

FRIENDSHIP DEVELOPMENT AMONG SINGLE ADULTS
IN A MEGACHURCH

A THESIS

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I dedicate this to my wife, Grace, for her unfaltering support and understanding while I was completing this thesis. I also dedicate this thesis to my children: Jocelyn, Jileen and David. I pray that this work will inspire you not only to pursue the meaningfulness of being a friend of God, but also to persevere in attaining greater academic heights.

No one has greater love than this,
to lay down one's life for one's friends.
You are my friends,
if you do what I command you.
I do not call you slaves any longer,
because the slave does not know what the master is doing;
but I have called you friends,
because I have made known to you
everything that I have heard from my Father.

John 15:13–15

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ABSTRACT

This research study examined the formation and sustainability of spiritual friendships among single adults in the megachurch congregation. Using the Social Penetration Theory developed by Altman and Taylor (1973), the research supported the notion that, as spiritual friendships develop, self-disclosure moves from relatively superficial, non-intimate areas to more intimate, personal layers of selves. The ten (10) friendship dyads consisting of six (6) pairs of women and four (4) pairs of men of the same gender were interviewed utilizing 13 open-ended questions designed to gather information regarding their friendship development, friendship stage, dyadic self-disclosure, and mutual cost and /rewards. A total of 215 single adults also participated in a 25-question ministry survey. Findings were consistent with the friendship stages of the Social Penetration Theory with deeper levels of self-disclosure based on common spiritual beliefs.

CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM AND SETTING

Purpose of the Study

This research study illuminated a societal concern regarding the formation and sustainability of friendships in a megachurch congregation. An investigation of how friendships develop, mature, and decline will enhance congregational leaders' abilities to lead or to communicate more effectively about the relational atmosphere of the church, its activities, and its functions.

Numerous studies by social scientists and church growth professionals have examined the causes of church membership growth, stagnancy, or decline. During the last ten years, special emphasis has been placed on whether there is a direct correlation between social development and church attendance.

According to a 2001 Gallup study, 44% of congregation members strongly agree with the statement, "Aside from family members, I have a best friend in my congregation" (Winseman 2002). These results are based on telephone interviews with 729 adult members (aged 18 or older) of a church, synagogue, or other religious faith community. Winseman (2002) indicated that the best congregational environments are those in which there are many real, genuine friendships. In addition, the more genuine friendship and trust exists in the congregation, the more effective and healthy the congregation will be.

Over 300,000 worshipers from more than 2,000 congregations nationwide participated in the U.S. Congregational Life Survey in April 2001. It concluded that 53% of respondents indicated that they have some close friends in their congregation,

as well as others who are not part of their congregation. Another 14% stated, “Most of my close friends are part of this congregation” (Bruce 2004).

A groundbreaking 2004 study commissioned and partnered by Group Publishing and Gallup identified a correlation between those churches that seemed to focus on developing friendships among the members and those that seemed to be experiencing the most growth. A summary of the study’s key findings includes the following conclusions: (1) church friendliness is correlated with both attendance and volunteerism; (2) members with best friends at church are more satisfied and engaged with their churches; (3) friendships with other church members are a leading reason individuals join a specific church; and (4) those who worship with a best friend are more likely to say their faith is involved in every area of their lives (Croucher 2005).

Friendships continue to be among the most significant relationships that individuals experience. The important role that friendship plays in the lives of individuals has been the focus of many studies, with interesting and sometimes surprising results. According to one study, in which 250 unmarried undergraduate students were asked to identify the person with whom they had their “closest, deepest, most involved, and most intimate relationship,” 36% identified that person as a friend, second only to romantic partners, with family members coming in a distant third (Berscheid, Snyder, and Omoto 1989, 794).

Most scholars would say that two persons have not begun a relationship if they have never interacted, whether formally or informally, in some way. Many of the conditions responsible for partners’ initial interactions are located in their social and physical environments. These environmental forces can be arrayed along a continuum

that represents the extent to which the partners are compelled to interact with each other or do so voluntarily (Gilbert, Fiske, and Lindsey 1998, 203).

Due to the large number of attendees and diverse programs and activities, the megachurch¹ provides a variety of opportunities for attendees to meet, interact, and develop friendships. The findings of a 2008 national study (Thumma and Bird 2009) of selected megachurches across the United States documented that nearly 55% of megachurch attendees who strongly agree that they have a sense of belonging also have many close friends at the church. However, in many ways, the megachurch is different in this aspect from other churches. In these very large churches, many attendees have good friends; but, at the same time, a large percentage of attendees do not. Based on conversations and observations, some people intentionally do not want to establish friendships, even if they are highly committed to the church. Certain people come because they can and want to be—and remain—anonymous.

Statement of the Problem

The results of a 2008 national study conducted by the Leadership Network and the Hartford Seminary's Institute for Religion Research drew 24,900 responses from 12 carefully selected megachurches located across the United States (Thumma and Bird 2009). The findings of this megachurch study revealed two interesting aspects of interpersonal relationships among single adults: (1) there continues to be a growing attraction among this demographic toward megachurches; and (2) over years, close friendships among this demographic tend to gradually decline, despite the length of church membership.

¹ The term "megachurch" generally refers to any Protestant congregation with a sustained average weekly attendance of 2,000 persons or more in its worship services.

The study documented that nearly one-third of megachurch attendees are single and unmarried. In a typical church, however, singles account for just 10 percent of the congregation. The vast majority of megachurch singles are 18–44 years old.

Additionally, it also revealed that 82% of megachurch attendees initially come at the invitation of a friend, co-worker, or family member. There is no personal guarantee that the inviter will be with the invitee throughout his or her tenure at the church. Some reasons may include: (1) the inviter may already have an established circle of friends, in which this person is not included; (2) the inviter may become disinterested, causing him or her to secure friendships elsewhere; (3) his or her presence may become too awkward—as in the state of a co-worker or family member; and (4) personal conflicts may arise or he or she simply opts to leave the church. As a result, the invitee must then take a personal initiative to develop his or her own friendship(s) or run the risk of feeling isolated, as well as possibly leaving the church. This seems to also be a contributing problem that exists even at the subject megachurch, Christ Church. In the online ministry survey, 41% of respondents admitted not making friendship development a priority (Figure 1.1), thereby setting up the possibility for interpersonal isolation.

Clearly, most people coming to a megachurch prefer doing so through a direct personal contact with someone they know. However, not everyone who visits or even attends a megachurch for a season will remain there. Thus, the issue of retention, or the question of why some stay and some do not, is critical to the overall growth of a congregation. In many congregations, a sense of belonging among members is strongly related to having many friends at the church.

An interesting aspect of the results revealed that some long-term attendees still do not have close friends at their churches. According to this study, the percentage of close friendships in megachurches dropped from 54% for those having less than one year of church membership to 27% for those who have attended for more than 10 years. To better understand this shift, one must consider the contributing factors that affect this change. What causes long term attenders to stay at the megachurch even after friendships decline? The most influential reasons are the senior pastor, worship style, and church reputation. These are followed secondarily by more programmatic characteristics, activities, amenities, and the presence of their friends (Thumma and Bird 2009). The question posed is whether this is a problem worth studying, and the answer is “yes.” The problem causes a shift in responsibility as the weight of duty, in terms of ensuring a sense of congregational cohesion (which ultimately propels church growth) is then primarily transferred from the congregants to the senior pastor or primary congregational leader—an impossible task for these individuals to handle by themselves.

The survey revealed that nearly half of the singles in megachurches have been at the churches for two years or less, but 20% of them have attended for six years or more (Thumma and Bird 2009). Clearly, there is pressure for the congregational leader to foster friendship development within this short, two year window. The author was prompted to conduct this research study due to the results signifying the direct correlation between close friends, sense of belonging, and church attendance.

The problem addressed in this research was the formation and sustainability of single adult friendships in a megachurch congregation. The pragmatic result of the

research enhances congregational leaders' abilities to lead and or communicate more effectively about the relational atmosphere of the church, its activities, and functions.

Research Questions

This study described relational dynamics among single adult friends within the context of a megachurch congregation. As such, Richard Osmer provides congregational leaders with a four-framework approach to aid them in engaging in practical theological interpretation of episodes, situations, and contexts that confront them in the ministry (Osmer 2008, 4).

The first task is the *descriptive-empirical task*. Osmer grounds the descriptive task in terms of 'a spirituality of presence,' a matter of attending to what is going on in the lives of individuals, families, and congregations (Osmer 2008, 33–34). In the same way, this qualitative study will conduct personal interviews through the use of a strategy Osmer calls "priestly listening."

The second task is the *interpretive task*. This stage entails taking the information learned during the descriptive task and drawing on theories from the arts and sciences to help understand the underlying issues. Osmer terms this stage "sagely wisdom" (Osmer 2008, 82–83). This study will look to the Social Penetration Theory as a source for understanding the issues surrounding the development of friendships in the megachurch setting.

The third task is the *normative task*, which asks, "what ought to be going on?" It seeks to discern God's will for present realities. Osmer refers to this task as "prophetic discernment," which involves both divine disclosure and the human shaping of God's word (Osmer 2008, 134–135). In the same manner, this study will

review biblical and theological truth and determine the types of friendships young single adults should have in the church.

The last task in this four-frame approach to practical theology is the *pragmatic task*. It seeks to answer the question, “how might we respond?” The objective of this task is to provide guidance to the servant leader in addressing the congregational change that will be warranted. In light of this task, the findings will be carefully reviewed in order to determine how the church can better promote Christian friendships among single adults in the congregation. Table 1.1 provides a matrix graphically outlining the four research questions that will guide this study. A practical theological framework developed by Richard Osmer will guide the research study.

Table 1.1. Richard Osmer’s Four-Frame Approach to Practical Theology

Task	Descriptive	Interpretive	Normative	Pragmatic
Osmer’s Question	What is going on?	Why is it going on?	What ought to be going on?	How might we respond?
Function	Priestly Listening	Sagely Wisdom	Prophetic Discernment	Servant Leadership
Research Question	RQ1: How are young adults making friends, and what determines the nature and quality of these relationships in a large congregation?	RQ2: What theories and models can provide insight and understanding in interpreting these dynamics?	RQ3: In light of biblical and theological truth, what should be the type of friendships young singles should have in the church?	RQ4: How can the church better promote and sustain true spiritual friendships?

This table was made using information taken from Osmer, Richard R. 2008. *Practical theology: An introduction*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Scope of the Study

Theological Framework

The theological framework highlighted God's involvement in the process of friendship development. First, it reviewed the biblical theological perspective of friendship from both the Old and New Testament standpoints and discusses the impact of each. Second, the researcher built a case on the theological importance on interpersonal relationships through four distinct doctrinal lenses—each showing God's intentionality for interpersonal relationships.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework was formed utilizing the social penetration theory as the foundation of friendship development. This theory posits that interpersonal exchange gradually progresses from superficial, non-intimate areas to more intimate, deeper layers of the selves of social actors (Altman and Taylor 1973, 6). To illustrate, the researcher selected three disciplines within the areas of mental health, education, and business to highlight the effects and importance of self-disclosure. The theory categorizes specific behaviors into a series of workable developmental stages within the social penetration process. Lastly, an application was formed that described these developmental stages in light of spiritual friendship within the church environment.

Methodology

The basis of the research project was the social penetration theory, which attempts to break down the process of interpersonal exchange and how friendships are formed. A mixed methods descriptive study was used for this research study. The qualitative research method examined information from the case study approach. The

selected case study consisted of interviewing six female pairs and four male pairs from the selected megachurch—their natural setting (Appendix B). The data from the interviews allowed the researcher to gather a description about the individual's friendship development and its stages of friendship, as suggested by the social penetration theory. A quantitative research method was also used; which consisted of an online survey—gathering data from six main categories—electronically distributed to 929 registered single adults from the subject megachurch (Appendix C).

Significance of the Study

The researcher found this study to be significant for the following reasons: (1) the selection of this topic is the investigation of the formation and sustainability of single adult friendships in a megachurch congregation—with the objective of arriving at clear pragmatic recommendations for improvement; (2) the need for this study addresses three components; a) the use of research outcomes and recommendations as tools to galvanize the church and ultimately create church growth, b) the use of the social penetration theory as a method for congregational leaders to assess the relational health of the congregation, and c) for the congregant(s) to recognize the need for spiritual friendships and address potential existing interpersonal flaws and undergo a specific relational plan; (3) the researcher—a congregational leader of a thriving 900 member single adult ministry is uniquely qualified and authorized to investigate its own ministry context; (4) the outcomes of this research study will enhance the already immense literature of interpersonal relationships introducing the correlation between the social penetration theory and spiritual friendships in the local church; and (5) the reader can consider the outcomes and recommendations as

practical application in three areas; a) personal development, b) congregational leadership skills, and c) church relational assessment abilities.

Limitations of the Study

This study had several limitations. First, data for this study consisted of the self-reported perceptions of congregants in local churches. This may have skewed the results, as the participants' perceptions may not accurately reflect what is in fact occurring. Participants may have feared being stigmatized by their peers, family, and church leaders. Second, this is a descriptive research study, attempting to identify formation and stages of friendship development; therefore, other relevant variables may not have been measured in this study. Third, this study was not generalized to other faiths or Christian denominations, because the author was only focusing on one non-denominational evangelical church. Fourth, the participants for the personal interviews were hand-selected from a larger database of individuals who met the selection criteria; excluding others for the study. Fifth, the researcher and interviewer is a pastor of the selected megachurch. As such, it may have been that participants may have felt awkward answering some questions for fear of breach of confidentiality, labeling, or stigmatization. Sixth, the selected megachurch is the author's home church; therefore, a sense of familiarity with the church, participants, and processes may have caused undue limitation. Lastly, this descriptive study provided a description of occurrences within a particular megachurch, and continuous research is needed to further examine the findings in light of other large churches.

Definitions of the Study

Studies on friendship development provide varied definitions of the term “friendship.” The definition of friendship can be subjective and depends greatly on one’s personal interpretation, which each person may or may not be able to articulate. This descriptive study will focus only on one aspect of friendship development—close (personal or best) friendships. Specifically, this study will address “close friendships” established and developed within a religious or church setting—also termed “spiritual friendships.” To provide a definition of the term “close friendships,” several studies on individual differences in lay conceptions of closeness (Helgeson, Shaver, and Dyer 1987; Rusbult, Onizuka, and Lipkus 1993) will be provided as a basis for the study. For the sake of clarity, definitions related to the following words or terms—acquaintances, casual friends, family friendships, and romantic (relationships) friendships, either hetero- or homosexual—will not be used in this study.

Selected Megachurch for Study

The focused demographic population for this study is megachurch attendees. The term megachurch generally refers to any Protestant congregation with a sustained average weekly attendance of 2,000 persons or more in its worship services (Thumma and Bird 2009). Due to the large number of attendees and diverse programs and activities affiliated with the megachurch, it generally allows for greater opportunities for attendees to meet, interact, and develop friendships.

The selected church for this study is Christ Church, a non-denominational Christian congregation comprised of people from diverse racial, cultural, and ethnic

backgrounds. Christ Church has seven weekend worship services, simultaneously operating out of two campuses located in the northern New Jersey towns of Montclair and Rockaway. As of February 2012, the church had 2,849 registered households, of which 929 are registered with a “single” marital status, representing 33 percent or one-third of the church. The attendance ranges from 3,200 to 3,800 on any given weekend which represents men, women and children. The campuses’ core values, vision, and thrust of ministry are surrounded around the mission: “Christ Church exists to unite people to God and people to people.” This mission statement is clear and specific for intentionally developing interpersonal relationships. Therefore, the selected church investigated in this study is crucial for two reasons: (1) the study attempts to validate the effectiveness of its mission statement in terms of interpersonal relationships; and (2) it affords the researcher (congregational leader) the opportunity to arrive at concrete outcomes germane to being more effective at leading its relational atmosphere.

Summary

This chapter outlined the study’s purpose, research questions guiding the thesis, scope of the study, and its significance, as well as the limitations of the study. In Chapter 2, the author will present the theological framework, as he builds the foundation for the study. Chapter 3 highlights the pennant literature examining why this study is relevant and any implications. Chapter 4 will discuss in detail the methodology used in the study. Chapter 5 presents the results of the investigation, and offers discussion, study implications, recommendations for future studies, and conclusion.

CHAPTER 2

THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

In reviewing the robust theological work from various scholars¹ on their definitions of the term “friendship,” it is important to conclude even from several standpoints that “Christian friendship is much more than a particular sociological phenomenon” (Fitzgerald 2007, 284). Christian friendship incorporates an intangible element into a tangible aspect of lives that only can be activated or enhanced by a relationship with God. Throughout history and biblical accounts, friendships are at the core of Christianity, whereas God is the center of one’s existence.

Central to the theological development of this research study, are the beliefs that God highly values relationships, friendships, and community. Therefore, as a congregational leader, the investigation on the formation and sustainability of friendships in a mega [church] seems fitting. The investigation of this study will enhance how other congregational leaders will choose to lead their congregations into a relational environment that is life-giving.

In providing a theological perspective on the formation and sustainability of friendship development, the researcher used the “*normative task*” in Richard Osmer’s four-frame approach to practical theology (Table 1.1). This portion in the framework seeks to discern God’s will for present realities, answering the question; “what ought to be going on?” Osmer refers to this function as “prophetic discernment,” which

¹ For a fuller definition of ‘friendship’ see: Gilbert Meilander. *Friendship: A study in theological ethics*. 1985, and Paul J. Wadell. *Becoming Friends: Worship, justice, and the practice of Christian friendship*. 2002 and Liz Carmichael. *Friendship: Interpreting Christian Love*. 2004.

involves both divine disclosure and the human shaping of God's word (Osmer 2008, 134–135).

Goal of the Theological Framework

In such a broad and complex subject as friendship and interpersonal relationships, this research study has narrowed the subject matter to specifically address the formation and sustainability of friendships. Furthermore, the theoretical framework for the study utilizes the social penetration theory, which states that interpersonal exchange gradually progresses from superficial, non-intimate areas to more intimate, deeper levels of selves.

In light of the theoretical background, the goal of the theological framework is to explain spiritual friendships within four distinct tracks. First, the researcher provided an overview of Greco-Roman perspective on friendship from three individual classical theories of friendship. Second, the researcher addressed the conception of “friendship” through the perspective of the Apostle Paul, which takes an implicit view of friendship (Fitzgerald 2007, 284). Third, the researcher addressed “self-disclosure” between Jesus and His disciples through a review of prominent verses in the Gospel of John. Fourth, the researcher addressed “friendship and disclosure” through four distinct lenses of systematic theology.

Overview of Classical Perspectives on Friendship

It is essential to begin with a general overview of the pre-Christian classical discussion of friendship, because it remained influential through the centuries and some understanding of it is essential if we are to understand later writers. Through the years, many scholars have committed to the vast study of friendship relationships,

which has expanded through time. Three such classical views of Greek friendship include those put forth by Aristotle, Augustine, and Aelred of Rievaulx. Through their extensive work on the topic, and the relevance of self-disclosure among friends, these philosophers have made considerable contributions within their fields and spheres of influence. It is for this reason that the author will opt to be selective and introductory, rather than detailed and comprehensive, in an attempt to provide a foundation to the more contemporary thoughts on the topic of friendship. As each philosopher is addressed, his ideals, influences, and commitments will be better understood and thus appreciated.

Aristotle

Aristotle set forth his theory of friendship (*philia*) in the eighth and ninth books of the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the seventh book of the *Eudemian Ethics*. Through his well-developed appreciation for the topic, Aristotle viewed friendship from a secular vantage point; nonetheless, we cannot exclude his works from the list of texts that might have influenced the Hellenistic discussion of the subject. As he understood the concepts and driving forces behind his focused students, Aristotle classified friendship into three kinds: character friendship or friendship that is grounded in virtue; friendship grounded in pleasure; and friendship grounded in utility (McKeon 1947, *Nic. Eth.* 8.2.1155b17–8.3.1156b32). Of the three, Aristotle wrote as though only in friendships based on character can one find a desire to benefit the other person, for the sake of the other person. “Those who wish good things to their friends for the sake of the latter are friends most of all, because they do so because of their friends themselves, and not coincidentally” (McKeon 1947, *Nic. Eth.*

8.3.1156b9–11). When one benefits someone not because of the kind of person one is, but solely because of the advantages to oneself, then, Aristotle says, one is not a friend toward the other person, but only toward the profit that comes one's way (McKeon 1947, *Nic. Eth.* 8.3.1157a15–16).

Aristotle also believes that, for friendship to exist, the disposition toward friendship must be reciprocated by the friend. Friendship must be for the good of both parties who desire to disclose each other's life, joys, and sorrows (Fitzgerald 1997, 38). Lastly, Aristotle makes it clear that the number of people with whom one can sustain the kind of relationship he calls a "perfect friendship" is quite small (McKeon 1947, *Nic. Eth.* 9.10.1170b20–1171a20). If one lived in a city populated entirely by perfectly virtuous citizens, the number of people with whom one could carry on a friendship of the perfect type would be at most a handful. Friendship can exist only when one spends a great deal of time with the other person during which the friends participate in joint activities and engage in mutually beneficial behavior; one cannot cooperate on these close terms with every member of the community.

Augustine

As we compare the differences between Aristotle and Augustine, we can note that the most significant difference is found in Augustine's Christianity in contrast with Aristotle's avoidance of divine involvement. For Augustine, God is the giver, protector, and sustainer of friendship. Even more, it is in desiring friendship with others that we are often led to desire an ultimate, personal relationship with God. For the Christian, Aristotle's model of friendship on its own is not enough, precisely because of the centrality of God in Augustine's account. Augustine did not leave any systematic treatise on friendship, nor did he attempt to formulate a philosophy of friendship. He

did, however, reflect frequently on the subject, especially with regard to his own relationships—descriptions of which were scattered throughout his letters, *Confessions*, sermons, and treatises—in order to develop a concept of Christian friendship. Augustine had four fundamental points that distinguish his concept of friendship from the pagan ethos. His four points are: (1) God is the author and the giver of friends; (2) friendship must model God; (3) Christian friendship is transfigured by grace; and (4) friendship attains its perfection only in heaven (McNamara 1964, 215–216). However, as many of his contemporaries were greatly influenced by Cicero’s treatise on friendship, nevertheless, Augustine agreed with two other aspects of friendship: (1) shared life builds friendship over time; and (2) proximity of friendship does not matter (Wadell 2002, 78–93).

The most intriguing aspect of Augustine’s account of friendship is his claim that we do not choose our friends—they are brought to us by God. For Augustine, our friends—especially our closest and lifelong friends—are God’s gift. Often, when individuals find it hard to explain the sudden joining of lives, they will conclude that these meetings of people are ordained by God and are the providential workings of God. At times, one will hear such conversations when individuals are asked to explain the origins of their friendships. Nonetheless, grace and choice are not incompatible because, while friendships are gifts of God, this does not rule out some kind of choice and confirmation on our part. Friendships certainly demand our active response and ongoing cooperation.

A second aspect of Augustine’s view worth discussing is his understanding and agreement that a shared life of friendship, sustained over time, brings a rich,

deep, intimacy, and unity to the friends, as they become one in spirit and soul. He often remarked, when discussing friendship, that through friendship many become as one (White 1992, 188). Augustine lived during a time of societal disharmony and conflict. Thus, he believed that the only answer for peace would be found in shared friendships in communities; namely, the church, where people were united together in Christ, the one who came to overcome all that estranges us from one another and to show us how to be one.

Aelred of Rievaulx

Aelred, a monk, began writing *Spiritual Friendship* around 1147/48, with the aim to show his fellow monks at Rievaulx what good friendships should be in the monastic life and how they could aid one's life in Christ. Like Augustine, he believed good, healthy relationships should serve one's life in Christ, not hinder it. Aelred was greatly influenced by Augustine's account in the *Confessions* of the role of friendships in his life. His thinking on the topic was further shaped after reading Cicero's *De Amicitia (On Friendship)*, and Aelred even acknowledged him in the prologue to *Spiritual Friendship*.

Similar to Aristotle, Aelred identified three kinds of friendship, but unlike his predecessor, Aelred rejected the first two kinds and accepted only the third, spiritual friendship, as fulfilling all the requirements of friendship. The first kind of friendship Aelred described is *carnal friendship*. Aelred referred to this as any friendship that originates in a mutual love for immorality. Carnal friendships are centered in shared weaknesses and corrupting behavior. At their worst, carnal friendships are partnerships in evil—sinful relationships in which a person has found someone with

whom he or she is comfortable doing wrong (Laker 1977, SF 1:35–36). Aelred warned that such friendships do not cultivate virtues but deadly sins. The second kind of friendship Aelred discussed is *worldly friendship*. While this type may appear better than carnal friendships, it is nonetheless deficient because, according to Aelred, it is born not from a “desire for goodness but from a desire for temporal advantage or possessions.” In fact, such friendships are “always full of deceit and intrigue.” They “contain nothing certain, nothing constant, nothing secure,” and change “with fortune and follow the purse” (Laker 1977, SF 1:42). These friendships are born only because of our desire for something we can gain from them. They are self-serving and only driven to achieve our own advantage. They have the appearance of true friendship because each “friend” is a master at flattering the other, but beneath the flattery is little affection or genuine regard. The most deceitful part of this friendship is that once the needs of one or both parties have been met, the friendship soon dissipates. The third type of friendship that Aelred believed to be its truest form of friendship is called *spiritual friendship*. Aelred understood that carnal and worldly friendships risk separating us from God. In spiritual friendship, the principal good is a mutual love for Christ and a desire to grow together in Christ. These friendships are centered in Christ, they seek Christ, and they strive to live according to Christ (Laker 1977, SF 1:16). Through this friendship, the parties want to help one another lead Godly and holy lives. In a more personal sense, “holy friendships are those people who challenge the sins we have come to love, and who help us discern God’s work in our lives and affirm gifts that we are afraid to claim” (Jones 2006, 31).

Aelred explored many aspects of friendship in his exposition of spiritual friendship, but there is one aspect worth noting for this study. Aelred believed that true spiritual friendship occurs because each of us needs someone with whom we can be completely open, someone in whose presence we can relax our hearts. Aelred described spiritual friends as those with whom we share “all our confidences and plans” (Laker 1997, SF 3:83). In other words, a spiritual friend is someone we trust and feel comfortable enough with to share the secrets, dreams, and hopes of our hearts, including matters of the soul. We need a confidant who cares enough for us and respects us so completely that we do not fear revealing to him or to her the deepest parts of whom we are, even those aspects of our lives of which we might be embarrassed or ashamed: our failures and fears, our struggles and ongoing temptations, even our sinfulness. Aelred further warned that this is why we need to be cautious and sure as to whom we are willing to “bare our souls” (Laker 1997, SF 3:40).

Summary

For the purpose of this study, there are at least four aspects of friendship from the mentioned philosophers worth highlighting: (1) we do not choose our friends—they are brought to us by God (*Aristotle*); (2) friendship should be grounded in virtue (*Aristotle*); (3) a shared life of friendship, sustained over time, brings a rich, deep intimacy and unity to the friends, resulting in the friends becoming one in spirit and soul (*Augustine*); and (4) spiritual friends are those with whom we share “all our confidences and plans” (*Aelred*). Although distinct, these philosophers share a

common thread of focus, which is that true friendship requires the unifying of one's consciousness with that of another and will last over a span of time

Biblical Theological Perspective

Friends of the Triune God

In laying out a biblical theological perspective of friendship, we must gain a sense of understanding regarding the divine relationship between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit—the triune God. Human relationships can be described depending upon what core values we see in them. For instance, a spouse can be a partner, a lover, or a friend. In the same manner, the relationship among the persons of the Trinity carries out different tasks or roles under the one divine being. The New Testament refers to God as “Father” who speaks reality into existence, with the liturgical repetition of “Let there be...” (Genesis 1:3–28). Other passages refer to the second person of the Trinity; Jesus Christ as “the son” or the Word (*logos*), which “was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being” (John 1:2–3). During this same time “the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters” (Genesis 1:2). These persons are not separate—that would imply that they are different gods—but they are distinct as persons, and this distinction is what makes it possible for God to share love within himself from all eternity (Fairbairn 2009, 54). The doctrine of the Trinity affirms that all three persons comprise of a unity (Matthew 28:19).

The Triune God lies at the heart of our Christian experience. Affirming the doctrine of the Trinity—the one God is Father, Son, and Spirit united in love—forms the heart of the Christian understanding of God. God's triune nature means that God

is social or relational—God is the “social Trinity.” And for this reason, we can say that God is “community.” God is the community of the Father, Son, and Spirit, who enjoy perfect and eternal fellowship. The God who is relational within the eternal divine being enters into relationship with creation (Grenz 1998, 52). Robert Jenson writes, “The original point of trinitarian dogma and analysis was that God’s relation to us are internal to him, and it is in carrying out this insight that the “relation” concept was introduced to define the distinction of identities” (Jenson 1982, 120). In a similar manner, Elizabeth Johnson claims that the priority of relation in the triune God challenges and critiques the concentration of classical theism on “singleness” in God. The persons are “constituted by their relationships to each other, each is unintelligible except as connected with the others” (Johnson 1992, 216). In seeking to explain this, thinkers in the early church turned to an idea known as *perichoresis*. This refers to the mutual interdependence, even mutual interpenetration of Father, Son and Holy Spirit in their trinitarian relation with one another. It seeks to understand that God is social and not a solitary being (Grenz 2004, 23–57).

In this social relationship of the triune God; we come to understand that the love that characterizes the Trinity is vulnerable, open, self-giving, and self-revealing (John 3:16–21; 5:20; 10:17; 15:9). Catherine LaCugna, asserts that the triune God is “self-communicating” and exists from all eternity “in relation to another” (LaCugna 1991, 14–15). It is the model for our own openness to one another. Through this sharing we know ourselves as friends. Christian friendship is measured by faithfulness and self-disclosure (John 15:11–15). The intimate disclosure of Jesus to his disciples is the basic content of Christian counsel. Jesus’ sharing of his relation to

the Father is a model for our communication with the Father and with others. Buber contends that the *I-Thou* relation between the individual and God is a universal relation which is the foundation for all other relations. If the individual has a real *I-Thou* relation with God, then the individual must have a real *I-Thou* relation with the world (Buber 1958, 26).

Pauline Conception of Christian Friendship

The Apostle Paul does not use either the word “friendship” (*philia*) or the word “friend” (*philos*) in his writings. Instead, Paul uses friendship “language” in particular, in his letter to the church of Philippi. The same is true that Paul does not use the word “Christian” but he surely has a concept of what is entailed by that term. The theological basis for Paul’s understanding of friendship is in its meaning of “reconciliation.” To be reconciled with God (2 Corinthians 5:20) means concretely to become the friend of God. For Paul, it is in and through Christ’s death that God has reconciled Christ-believers and made them his friends. Christian friendship is linked to God’s reconciling act, with Christ’s death, forming the basis for both reconciliation and friendship with God and with one another (Fitzgerald 2007, 292).

A theology of friendship must be based on the character of the triune God as decisively displayed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Therefore, using Philippians as a springboard into a theology of friendship seems quite fitting.

Scholars often call Philippians a letter of friendship.² In gaining an understanding of the Apostle’s Paul’s conception of Christian friendship; the researcher’s aim is to explore specific verses in chapters 1 and 2. In addition, the researcher will highlight

² See the essays in *Friendship, Flattery and Frankness of Speech*, especially Fitzgerald’s essay, “Philippians in the light of Some Ancient Discussions of Friendship.”

verses in chapter 4 to provide a comparative analysis related to the cost and rewards of spiritual friendships.

In Philippians 1:27, the Apostle Paul draws upon language from ancient descriptions of friendship. Notably, friends were commonly depicted as people of “one spirit or soul” (McKeon 1947, *Nic. Eth.* 9.8.2). The Apostle Paul also believe that an important characteristic of friendship is when a shared life of friendship, sustained over time, brings a type of unity that makes friends become one in spirit and soul (Wadell 2002, 78–93). Friends are expected to share both joy and sorrow, to rejoice with those who rejoice and to weep with those who weep (Romans 12:15). Paul understood the significance of friendship and sharing one’s life with another, thus cultivating a type of unity that is binding through Jesus Christ. This action of binding together would undoubtedly create a friendship that would allow the free disclosure of one’s deepest thoughts, feelings, and actions with the other person.

This language conveys the idea that friendship should take on the character of being steadfast, like soldiers who refuse to leave their appointed posts. The phrase in *one spirit* has a reference to being one with the Holy Spirit (Fee 1995, 163–66). This is supported by Paul’s reference to the Philippians’ “partnership in the Spirit” in 2:1, as well as his use of the language of “one Spirit” in other contexts (1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 2:18; 4:3–4). It is the Spirit who is the source of their unity. And it is the one Spirit who enables them to stand firm in the face of opposition (Hooker 2000, 496).

The Apostle Paul continues to reveal his conception of spiritual friendship in Philippians 2:2. If the Philippians have experienced such extraordinary blessings by

virtue of being in Christ, they have an obligation to respond appropriately. Paul urges them to fill his joy to the brim by the way they live in relation to one another (Marshall 1991, 43). Paul's personal appeal for the Philippians to complete his joy is entirely appropriate in this conversation between close friends. In light of their deep bond of mutual affection, the Philippians can fulfill his joy by being like-minded in their life together. Being like-minded in this sense is not much an intellectual activity as it is a life attitude or mind-set, which results in a certain lifestyle. Paul is not saying that spiritual friends are all to have identical ideas, opinions, or points of view. He is not saying that they are not independent in their thinking. Rather, it's about putting aside selfish desires for the good of the entire relationship and community. In practice, it is having the same priorities, having a unified purpose, and embracing a common way of seeing the world (Bockmuehl 1998, 109).

The habits, dispositions, and actions Christ displays in Philippians 2:6–11 are precisely what Paul wants the Philippians to display toward each other. Paul provides a sort of guideline for spiritual friendships. What is worth noting in these scripture verses is the act of seeking to benefit others. Deepening our friendships with God and each other is both the task and goal of the Christian life because friendship is at the very heart of God's identity. In vv.6b-8 we see the dispositions and actions of Jesus who while is equal with God, never stops being equal with God and does not use this equality for his own advantage. Rather, while seeking the benefit of others, he willingly empties himself. The contrast here is between what Christ originally was and what he became (Marshall 1991, 53). This characteristic of God is often referred to as God's benevolence. God's gracious benevolence toward us is to mark our

friendships with each other. “Benevolence implies not only that the friend is loved for herself, but also, because she is loved, the active seeking of her good is the sustaining project of the lover’s life. This is what friendship is, mutual devotion to the good of the other because it is a good that both share” (Wadell 1989, 131–132). Humans are made for friendship with God. This is a consequence of being created in the image of God whose very life is the inseparable communion of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In Christ, and through the power of the Spirit, we enter a journey of ever-deepening friendship with God. We are called and enabled to pursue that journey in the company of other friends, engaging in a three-way friendship with them and Christ.

Lastly, an aspect worth noting is Paul’s use of agricultural and commercial imagery to describe friendship and its services (Philippians 4:15–19). He uses the language of credits and debits, of “giving and receiving,” to describe his interaction with his friends at Philippi. This type of friendship is commonly viewed as an exchange relationship in which there is not only a reciprocal nature of the friendship, but also a utilitarian component. In other words, there were benefits or rewards for being in this friendship; whether they were immediate, cumulative or forecasted into the future (Altman and Taylor 1973, 32–33). The Apostle Paul attempted to make known that these rewards were not for his personal gain, but rather rewards that would only be realized in heaven by the people to whom and through which they are given.

The high concentration of financial language in this passage (e.g., the matter of giving and receiving [v.15]; what may be credited to your account [v.17]; full payment [v.18]) is not just about money. In the Greco-Roman world, the giving and

receiving of gifts was shaped by a network of social rules and relationships. The exchange of material benefits (gifts and services) played a vital role in both friendships between social equals and in relationships between socially superior patrons and inferior clients (Peterman 1997, 197). Gifts in antiquity had strings attached. Normally, accepting a gift would put the receiver in the giver's debt—a socially inferior position—which carried the obligation to repay in kind or even more (Witherington 1994, 127). On the other side, giving a gift could increase the status of the giver. It was one way of gaining a commodity of much greater importance: honor (Fowl 2005, 24). As a result, the giving and receiving of benefits could easily degenerate into a kind of “power game,” in which one party held the upper hand over the other (Fee 1995, 444). Because the mutual exchange of gifts was tied up with the relative power and status of the parties involved, Paul understandably handles the matter with care (Fowl 2005, 190). The dynamics of “rewards and costs” among interpersonal relationships will be discussed in greater length in the literature review.

Johannine Conception of Self-disclosure in Jesus Christ

The theoretical framework used as a foundation of friendship development was the social penetration theory. The theory posits that interpersonal exchange gradually progresses from superficial, non-intimate areas of self-disclosure to more intimate, deeper layers of selves (Altman and Taylor 1973, 6). The theory indicates that superficial to intimate self-disclosure progresses at each interpersonal developmental stage; i.e., acquaintance, close to very close friendship (Altman and Taylor 1973, 135–141).

In this section, the researcher highlighted the dynamics of the “friendship” between Jesus Christ and His disciples, in light of the social penetration theory; particularly, the focus will be on the disciples and their change of relationship status from slaves to friends. And, although the idea of slave is valid, it is limited. Here Jesus’ point is in intimacy. The researcher utilized John 15:13–15 to capture the theological thought:

No one has greater love than this,
to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. (v.13)
You are my friends,
if you do what I command you. (v.14)
I do not call you slaves any longer, (v.15)
because the slave does not know what the master is doing;
but I have called you friends,
because I have made known to you
everything that I have heard from my Father. (John 15:13–15)

Unlike the Apostle Paul, the Johannine literature of the New Testament reflects no hesitancy in using the term “friendship” to describe both the relation of Christ to his disciples and the relationship of the disciples to one another. The term “friend” (*philos*) occurs 29 times in the New Testament. It is found eight times in the Johannine corpus. The term “friends” which enters at v.13 remains the theme of the next two verses. Jesus asks his listeners, as the Evangelist asks his readers, to use theologically the human capacity to have friends and to be a friend. He does not begin with suggestions about familiar, easy companionship and then build to a sense that there may be costs to be a friend. Instead, in v.13, Jesus has already given us an insight into what He means by “friend.” It is a kind of relationship which is so deep and close that we are prepared to lay down our very lives for the friend. The idea that one should lay down one’s life for one’s friends was well known in the Ancient world

(McKeon 1947, *Nic. Eth.* 9.8.2). This shows the intensity and quality of Jesus' love for his own (Brown 1970, 862; Maloney 1998, 425).

Interestingly, Erich Fromm, in his book titled "*The Art of Loving*," takes the posture that the term "giving of one's life" as a sign of love is not an act that should be taken literally. Rather, the act is more of a giving of that which is alive in him—he gives of his joy, of his interest, of his understanding, of his knowledge, of his humor, of his sadness—of all expressions and manifestations of that which is alive in him (Fromm 1956, 24). In either case, this goes beyond mere acquaintance, the associations where we pass the time of day, but in which there has been no significant self-giving. The friendship that Jesus means here is the binding of two personalities into such a union that each feels the hurts of the other, and each has a stake in the welfare of the other. At the time Jesus was giving this message to the disciples, this kind of depth was not yet true of their relationship with Jesus. He was calling them friends in the hope that they would ultimately measure up to this height, but in actuality they had a long way to go. At this stage, although they were obviously very attached to Him, they still wanted to use Him. For instance, they had hoped He would set up an earthly kingdom, and give them rightful position; as witnessed by the ugly lobbying of the mother of James and John (Matthew 20:20–28). Fortunately, what He can do for us and what we can do for Him are not mutually exclusive possibilities. Essentially, friendship is sharing life—its joys and sorrows—with someone else. Friendship with Christ takes this to the highest plane, where we become immersed in everything that is upon His heart.

Jesus' interpersonal relationship with His disciples arrives at a climax in which he mentions to them that they are about to take an important step forward in the life they are to share with Him. They are to be promoted from the status of "slave to friend." The highest status to which we can attain is as His friend and confidante. Human relationships undergoes a series of developmental stages; i.e., acquaintance, casual, close and very close. In the same manner, the first stage of our relationship with Jesus is slavery or servanthood. Actually, we never leave this. We are always His slaves called to be His friends. The difference is that in the first immature stage we are slaves only; in the second stage we are slaves elevated to be friends of the Most High. Slavery with Christ means limitation, but it is the kind of limitation a train has in having to confine itself to the railroad tracks, it would be freer in a sense, but it would never go any place. Christ demands an unconditional surrender to Himself and absolute control over our lives. He knows He cannot permeate the soul if there is any resistance to Him.

In v.14, the term "friends" does not refer to some sort of elite among Jesus' followers—select persons who are made party to privileged insight which is withheld from others. Instead, Jesus answers: "You are my friends if you do what I command you." Not that obedience makes the disciples Jesus' friends; it simply characterizes them as such (Carson 1991, 522). "Friends" is a status more elevated even than "disciples." Whereas servants or slaves are simply told what to do, friends are given more information, which enables them to attain a fuller understanding in their obedience (Carson 1991, 523). We must be wary about imposing upon these passages a notion of friendship as principally a category of affection rather than on personal

action. In the Greco-Roman world, friendship comprehends as a series of complex obligations, duties and claims (Goldhill 1986, 82). He says that they are friends and reminds them that this means obedience on their part (v.14). Jesus here is tying our human relationships to his relationship with the Father. God loves him; he loves his Father and obeys him. In obedience to the Father, he comes into the world to love us with the very same love with which he and the Father have loved each other (Fairbairn 2009, 27). It is nearly impossible to continue as friends with people with whom we oppose. Jesus does not mean that a condition of friendship is a servile, boot-licking relationship. Rather, a recognition that what he discloses is to be taken with full seriousness (Morris 1991, 525). He is making it clear to the disciples that this friendship is not something they can take for granted. Plummer renders the phrase “And when I say ‘friends,’ I mean you” (Plummer 1899, 277). It is not a status they have attained as a reward for faithfulness at the slave level. Jesus enables his disciples to participate in the intimacy and trust of the Father by means of which they acquire that “openness” which is the privilege of a free man and a friend (Schnackenburg 1982, 110).

In v.15, the Johannine concept of self-disclosure begins to take shape as Jesus explains to the disciples that all the secrets that have come from His own communion with the Father are to be theirs because they are His friends. The disciples are Jesus’ friends because he has spoken to them in an “open” and “plain” manner regarding everything that he has heard from the Father (Schnackenburg 1982, 160–161). The disciples thereby fulfill the ideal of Abraham and Moses. Abraham was called God’s friend (2 Chronicles 20:7; Is 41:8), and he was one from whom God did not keep

secret his plan for Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18:7). Moses likewise was God's friend, for "the Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend" (Exodus 33:11; cf. Deuteronomy 34:10). Such intimacy with God is now open to all in Christ. Jesus says he has kept nothing hidden (v.15), an important claim for the all-sufficiency of Jesus' revelation of the Father.

The disciples did not understand everything at this point, but were prepared to follow Jesus in principle and thus become recipients of his revelation, which in due course will lead to greater understanding (Borchert 2002, 150). In other words, just as the disciples are to become His friends by placing themselves utterly at His disposal, He is going to treat them as friends by sharing with them even His inner life with God. He is doing this because He needs friends with whom He can share. We all do. It isn't possible for us to exist amid the pressures of living with people without building up all kinds of tensions inside and accumulating a lot of hurt too. This can soon prove too great a burden for us unless it is shared with someone we trust. Because Jesus was human, too, He longed for friends to whom He could bare His heart. It appears that mostly He wants friends with whom He can share the wonderful news about living that God is making known to Him. These disclosures to His friends did not end with His earthly life. That would have been tough on us, because we would never have had these intimate moments when he could share with us the gems from God. We constantly need new truth to meet our changing conditions. If we are abiding in Him, He will always be telling us new secrets.

The sharing in friendship can never be one-sided. Friends confide and share, expressing their mind to one another freely. They bring one another into their hopes

and plans, opening at the same time their fears and anxieties. The depth of relationships that Jesus has in mind implies two hearts completely open to one another. Jesus had no secrets from His disciples. He wanted them to hide no secrets from Him either. He needed the sense of closeness that came from their confidences, and they needed the release that such sharing brings. Jesus' idea of a friend was a "confidante" who shares the knowledge of his superior's purpose and voluntarily adopts it as his own (Tenney 1981, 153). Aelred of Rievaulx also indicated that a true friend is one who is a confidante (Laker 1997, SF 3:83). By definition, a confidante is someone who has earned another's confidence, and it is only to such trusted or trustworthy individuals that full disclosure is made. In the same manner, no one discloses secrets or sensitive information to casual acquaintances. However, Jesus discloses everything to His disciples in spite of the fact that they are unreliable and untrustworthy, as evidenced by Peter denying him three times (John 18:15–18, 25–27). The disclosure of the mind of God concerning his career and theirs would give them assurance that they were engaged in the right task and that God would ultimately bring it to a successful conclusion. Friendship with Him is far more than a mere confessional. It is the sharing with Him of every area of the life, of whatever we are interested in, significant or trivial. This, too, is the essence of continuous prayer. Most conversation between friends is usually aimless, free association of ideas, often about the minutiae of living. But, He is interested in us having an openness and naturalness in our conversations with Him.

Summary

The Johannine literature of the New Testament reflects no hesitancy in using the term “friendship” to describe both the relationship of Christ to his disciples and the relationship of the disciples to one another. Paul, on the other hand, uses “friendship language” to convey that friendship is born out of God reconciling humanity to himself through his son Jesus Christ. In both instances, there is a sharing of one’s self with the other that ultimately causes full disclosure of one’s deepest thoughts and feelings to the other person. This reciprocal sharing of giving and receiving becomes an important benefit and aspect of their friendship.

Theological Friendship Lenses

The aim of this section is to further build on the foundation of “friendship.” This section will explore key concepts of “friendship and disclosure” through the lenses of systematic theology. The selected major headings were chosen because of its theological significance in the area of friendship and interpersonal relationships. The following four major doctrines were selected for this study: (1) The Doctrine of God; (2) The Doctrine of Christ; (3) The Doctrine of Man; and (4) The Doctrine of the Church.

The Doctrine of God: The Moral Attributes of God

The Image of God (*Imago Dei*)

Moral attributes are those characteristics or qualities that belong to God, especially in relation to His creatures. These attributes are also those that God intends humans to possess, and thus they are called communicable attributes (Connor 1980, 52). Moral attributes are what constitute part of the “image” of God. The idea first

appears in Genesis 1:26, where we read that God—in solemn counsel with Himself—said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness.” There are several understandings of the image of God; however, for the purposes of this study, we will focus upon the “moral aspects” of our likeness to God. As human creatures, we are morally accountable to God for our actions. We have an inner sense of right and wrong. When we act according to God’s moral standards, our likeness to God is reflected in behavior that is holy and righteous before Him, but in contrast, our unlikeness to God is reflected whenever we sin (Grudem 1994, 445–446). This moral aspect of God’s likeness enables us to view friendships in a manner consistent with His attributes of love, faithfulness, and goodness, just to name a few.

God’s Moral Attribute of Benevolence

Benevolence is a basic dimension of God’s love. By this we mean God’s concern for the welfare of those whom He loves. He unselfishly seeks our ultimate welfare (John 3:16; Deuteronomy 7:7–8). Our relationship with God is on a friend-to-friend and not on an employer/employee, or master/slave, basis. He is concerned with our good for our own sake, not for what He can gain from us. God loves us on the basis of that likeness of Himself, which He has placed within us in creating us (Genesis 1:27). God loves us for what He can give to us or make of us, both in the original creative act and in His continued relationships with us (Erickson 1998, 320). We imitate this communicable attribute of God first, by loving God in return; and second, by loving others in imitation of the way God loves them (Grudem 1994, 199). This imitation of God’s love is demonstrated in the manner in which we treat others through our friendships.

God's Moral Attribute of Faithfulness

God's words are both true and the final standard of truth. This means that God is reliable and faithful in His words (Reymond 1998, 201), a characteristic of true friendship. Another characteristic is that God always does what he promises to do, and we can depend on Him to be true to His words and never to be unfaithful to His promises (Numbers 23:19; 2 Samuel 7:28). As in the case with His other moral attributes, the Lord expects believers to emulate His truthfulness. God's people are not to give their word thoughtlessly. An aspect of our relationship with God and to others means that when we give our word, we are to remain faithful to it (Ecclesiastes 5:4–5).

The Doctrine of Man: The Purpose of Man

Glorification of God the Creator

Scripture tells us that there was perfect love and fellowship among the members of the Trinity for all eternity (John 17:5, 24). Therefore, God did not create us because He was lonely or because He needed fellowship with other persons—God did not need us for any reason. While it was clear there was a special fellowship that had developed with God and His creation (Genesis 3:8–9), the main reason God engaged in the act of creation was to glorify Him, God, indicating that we are important to God himself. Fullness of joy is found in knowing God and delighting in the excellence of His character. To be in His presence, to enjoy fellowship with Him, is a greater blessing than anything that can be imagined (Psalms 84:12, 10). As we glorify God and enjoy Him, Scripture tells us that He rejoices in us (Isaiah 62:5). When we realize that God created us to glorify Him, and when we start to act in ways

that fulfill that purpose, then we begin to experience an intensity of joy in the Lord that we have never before known. One way in which God is glorified is when He is delighted by relationships that are united in Him and for His purpose. When our friendships are rooted in His love, He is well pleased and He is glorified.

Personal Relationships

God did not create human beings to be isolated persons; but, in making us in His image, He made us in such a way that we can attain interpersonal unity of various sorts in all forms of human society (Grudem 1994, 454). God made Adam and Eve in such a way that they would share love, communication, and mutual giving of honor to one another in their interpersonal relationship.

In addition to our unique ability to relate to God, there are other relational aspects of being in God's image. For instance, animals no doubt have some sense of community with each other; however, the depth of interpersonal harmony experienced in human marriage, in a human family when it functions according to God's principles, and in a church when a community of believers is walking in healthy friendships with each other, is much greater than the interpersonal harmony experienced by any animals. In the same manner, our family and interpersonal friendships are also superior to the lives of angels, who do not marry, bear children, or live in the company of God's redeemed sons and daughters.

As God created humanity in His own image, He also established that His social nature is grounded in His affections. As God has a social nature, so He has endowed humans with a social nature. Consequently man seeks companionship (Thiessen 1952, 222). God made man for Himself, and man found supreme

satisfaction in communion with the Lord. However, God provided also human fellowship. He created the woman, for He said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a help meet for him” (Genesis 2:18). It is clear that God created man to enjoy companionship and friendship for the purpose of sharing oneself with another. It is inherent to create beings to want to constantly fill the empty void of companionship. We crave the sharing of our lives with another, regardless of gender.

The Doctrine of Christ: The Finished Work on the Cross

The Ministry of Reconciliation

The category under which we now consider Christ’s work—that of reconciliation—is securely based upon four major passages: Romans 5:10–11, 2 Corinthians 5:17–21, Colossians 1:19–22, and the passage that will be highlighted in this section of the study, Ephesians 2:14–17. Many scholarly works present detailed studies of the Pauline material on reconciliation. Of course, the topic is regularly treated by systematic theologians and ethicists as well (Turner 1989, 89–90).

However, in this study, Ephesians 2:14–17 will be discussed due to its view of reconciliation within horizontal relationships. The main theme for this passage worth noting is that Paul informs us that Christ did what He did at the cross not only in order to transform the two—Jews and Gentiles—into one new man, but also in order to reconcile both to God (Reymond 1998, 649). Clearly, it is God’s enmity that Paul boldly says Christ “put to death” by his death (Ephesians 2:16).

The reconciliation language in this passage also relates to corporate reconciliation. The enmity or hostility removed by Christ’s redemption is not merely vertical, but also horizontal. The stipulations of the Mosaic Covenant formed a barrier

between Jews and Gentiles, which Christ abolished (2:14, 15) on the cross. This act allowed for “one new man” (2:15) and “one body” (2:16), in which equal access to God is opened up to all who believe, Jew and Gentile alike (2:18). The experience of reconciliation through Christ radically redefines vertical and horizontal human relationships, as there is now peace between humanity and God and peace between Jews and Gentiles (2:14, 17). The initiative now is with God, who changes a relationship of enmity to one of friendship. This is accomplished *through Christ*—that is, through His death on the cross (Romans 5:10).

This aspect of divine reconciliation is important within the framework of friendship development. Christ’s work on the cross has given us the inner conscience to view others with a sense of peace and not hostility. Without Christ’s work on the cross, friendship development would not exist in the manner we know today.

New Relationships between Believers

Christ compared the unity of believers with that of the Father to the Son. It is important to note how significant Jesus regarded relationships between people, insomuch that He prayed four times for unity between believers. In John 17:11, it is recorded that He asked “that they may be one, as we are.” In verses 21–23, He repeats this petition three times—“that they all may be one; even as we are one.” No human mind can comprehend the importance of this fourfold petition voiced by the Son to the Father. The type of unity that Jesus Christ desired is that which the Father could only accomplish. This prayer began to be answered on the Day of Pentecost, when believers were baptized by the Spirit into one Body, and is constantly answered whenever a soul is saved and thus joined as a member to the Body of Christ by the

same baptism of the Spirit. It is critical to understand, in light of Christ's fourfold prayer, that breaking this unity is an immeasurable sin against the work of God and the heart of Christ; yet it is broken outwardly when Christian friendships break suddenly, without any real justification, and inwardly when unforgiveness and divisions are nourished and cherished by Christians. The first commandment of Christ given in the upper room is that Christians are under the greatest imperative to love one another (John 13:34–35); and, by this love, all men are to know that those who so love are His disciples. It is clear that believers are appointed to maintain this divine unity. This must be done when there is a type of love for believers that is without class, distinction, prejudice, or rank. This unity is formed when believers are faithful to each other, not out of mere outward exercise of good fellowship, but because of the unity in Christ's Body.

The Doctrine of the Church: The Heart of Ministry

The Body of Christ

For the purposes of this study, the aim is to discuss the church in terms of the Body of Christ. The conception is to continue the theological foundation that friendships and disclosure first begin out of a relationship with Christ and then initiated and developed through the assembly in a church, either visible or invisible. The most widely used image to describe the church is its representation as the body of Christ (Berkhof 1953, 557). It is used both of the church universal and of individual local congregations. Paul's statement to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 12:27 illustrates, "Now you are the body of Christ, and each of you is a part of it." This image of the body of Christ also emphasizes the connection of the church, as a group

of believers, with Christ. Salvation, in all of its complexity, is in large part a result of believers' union with Christ. Christ is the head of a spiritual body (Colossians 1:18) of which believers are individual members or parts. This image of the body of Christ also speaks of the interconnectedness between all the persons who comprise the church. Christian faith is not to be defined merely in terms of individual relationships with the Lord. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul develops the concept of the interconnectedness of the body, especially in terms of the gifts of the Spirit. Hence he stresses the dependence of each believer upon every other. He emphasizes that "through all its parts are many, they form one body" (v. 12).

Each member needs the others and each is needed by the other. There is mutuality in this understanding of the body; each believer encourages and builds up the others. Members of the body are to bear one another's burden (Galatians 6:2) and to restore those who are found to be in sin (v.1). The body is to be characterized by genuine fellowship. This does not mean merely social interrelatedness, but an intimate feeling for and understanding of one another (Erickson 1998, 1048). In this body, there are to be empathy and encouragement (edification). What is experienced by one is to be experienced by all. The churches in the Book of Acts shared material possessions with one another, and they also shared their dreams, goals, struggles, and joys with each other. There was an open sharing of each other through Christ. An interesting aspect of the early church that remains today is that it formed social cliques and factions, an indication of a gathering of the church (1 Corinthians 11:17–19); however, this obscures the oneness of the body of Christ.

Physical Expression of Fellowship

There are frequent misunderstandings and confusion concerning the church. Part of the misunderstandings result from the multiple usages of the term *church*. Frequently, the term “church” is used to refer to a particular body of believers, such as the First Methodist Church. At other times, it is used to refer to a denomination, a group set apart by some distinctive; for instance, the Presbyterian Church or the Lutheran Church. The word church and cognate terms in other languages (e.g., *Kirche*) are derived from the Greek work ‘*kuriakos*,’ “belonging to the Lord.” In light of the New Testament Greek term, the church is ‘*ekklesia*,’ which means “assembly” or “congregation” and occurs some 114 times in the Greek New Testament. Because the Lord’s true assembly is in heaven, it appears in many ways on earth: in house churches, in city churches, and in the church universal (Clowney 1995, 32). Even two or three gathered in Christ’s name may claim His power, for He is there.

For this section of the study, the researcher’s aim is to view the “church” in respect to an architectural structure, a building that is used in part as a means to physically express the fellowship of other believers. It is understood that the “church” is both visible and invisible because “believers” are joined by the Holy Spirit regardless of the physical location of the believer. However, a person does not just have a body; he or she is a body. Additionally, a person does not live in a physical form; he or she exists as a physical form (Banks 2002, 77). This being the case, it should come as no surprise that physical actions best take place within a common place of connectedness—the physical building—the church. This physical building can take on many architectural forms, including someone’s home, a movie theatre or

a multi-million dollar structure. The fact remains that it is a gathering place for believers to physically share in the teaching of scripture, enjoying each other's company, sharing their possessions, and eating with one another (Acts 2:42–47). The relational rewards from these outward physical expressions of fellowship work best when there is consistency of use, either daily or weekly. Maturity in interpersonal relationships within the Body of Christ takes place when there are tangible physical expressions of love and unity, through a shared life of community among believers within a physical place.

Summary

Aspects of friendship and disclosure were viewed through the lens of four doctrines of the Christian faith. It has been concluded that there are clear similarities among interpersonal relationships related to the divinity. First, we note that, through God's moral attributes of benevolence and faithfulness, He unselfishly seeks our ultimate welfare and is true to completing the promises that He has given. Second, God created us to glorify Him and to ensure the ultimate interpersonal unity with others. Third, God sent His son, Jesus Christ, to reconcile humanity to Himself and to reconcile humanity with each other—a vertical and horizontal relationship. Fourth, as a metaphor, the “church” is established by Jesus Christ to illustrate His body as being one in unity. The function of the church is used to physically express the genuine relationship that believers have for one another through Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

In light of biblical and theological truth, the types of friendships young singles should have in the church stem from both personal preference and spiritual

significance. Many single adults are attracted to others based solely on utilitarian reasons; others, for their own enjoyment and pleasure. However, it is clear that God desires unity with others based upon sincere uprightness, character, and morality. Friendships among single adults should develop upon the sincere desire to see the other person mature in the Christian faith.

Another clear theological aspect of friendship development is based upon the spiritual significance of the reconciliation between humanity and Jesus Christ. Christian friendships should not be looked upon as a mere reconciliation of two or more human beings, but rather with an understanding of the spiritual significance that this relationship plays in the eyes of the Lord. Every word and action within the relationship should be seasoned with the qualities of love, grace, and mercy that are bestowed upon the person through Jesus Christ. In itself, quality friendships in the church are valuable to not only the church's existence, but also the growth of the body of Christ.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The subject of interpersonal relationships is broad and has precipitated the writing of much literature by people from varied sectors of society. Research indicates a growing trend in the United States among single adults regarding friendships. The importance of friendship in the lives of individuals justifies the study of the dynamics of friendship. It is necessary to consider the perceptions of both individuals involved in the friendship. Furthermore, the study of friendships involves many complicated factors that include understanding how these individuals formally and informally relate to others, process information, make decisions, and communicate.

General Conception of Spiritual Friendships

The aim in this section is to provide a general conception of spiritual friendships from expert thinkers on the topic. The first conception of spiritual friendship is related to the nature and limit of friendships. In the late 1930's, Anders Nygren's work promoted two opposing views between *Agape* and *Eros*; an influential view that understood Christian Agape as absolute altruism. Nygren emphasizes that "Agape" is God's love freely given love to all; whereas "Eros" is the possessive, calculating love exhibited by human beings (Nygren 1953). Countering this, in her book, *Friendship: Interpreting Christian Love*, Carmichael demonstrates convincingly that Christian love can be interpreted not only as inclusive of such elements as affection and delight, but also as extending friendship-love to the universal scope (Carmichael 2004, 199). In other words we are called to be friends

with the world. However, even ancient writers assumed friendship to have practical limits. We have to decide “for how much of our time, with what intensity, and for how long we ought to regard which strange and even repulsive neighbors we regard as our friends” (Cates 1997, 128). We are called to a universal love of friendship; in which can only occur and made possible through the grace of God. We must first, become a friend of God revealed in the friend Jesus (John 15:15). As Christ changes us, healing our past wounds, we are born again and enter a new world of relationships. No one can be the friend of Jesus without having many other friends (Houston 1989, 155). With such a mandate, Carmichael therefore suggests that friendship-love places its emphasis on the formation of character and on the practice of prayer so that character can come to its graced perfection (Carmichael 2004, 198).

A second concept of spiritual friendship is linked to the destructive potential of friendships. Because friends are so important and significant to our lives, if not careful, the wrong types of friendships have the power to do great harm. Meilaender in his book, *Friendship: A Study in Theological Ethics*, recognizes the vital importance of friendship in human life; but, he also sees the danger it poses (Meilaender 1985, 32). He emphasizes throughout the book that tensions exist between the earthly bonds of friendship given by God which enriches our life; and the calling of friendship which serves his neighbor. The tension between bonds of particular love and a love which is open to every neighbor (in the calling) cannot be overcome by any theory (Meilaender 1985, 102). This tension between particular and universal love can only be “solved” only as it is lived out in a life understood as a spiritual journey toward the God who gives both the friend and the neighbor. This

causes us to be extremely careful in the selection of spiritual friends. We may at times forget that the deep intimacy of friendship at its best involves preference. We may have been called to a universal love; but, a preferential love and friendship may exist with only one or maybe two persons. We know that Jesus Christ had twelve apostles, but we are also told that there was one whom he loved (John 1:35–42). This presents a clearer perception of spiritual friendship that enables us to understand that we ought to be friendly with many; but may only have close intimate friends with one or two.

A third concept of spiritual friendship is drawn from the discernment of knowing who your friends are. In *The Disciplined Heart: Love, Destiny, and Imagination*, Caroline Simon offers a caution of distinguishing false from true loves (Simon 1997, 23). In her book, Simon focuses more on loves that do what they are supposed to do—help us become who God created us to be (Simon 1997, 106). Friendship has a central role to play, she thinks, in the life of contemporary Christians, and it is best understood in light of its connection to the notion of destiny. We are, each of us as created beings, made for a purpose. Various sorts of loves and friendships help us work out that purpose in different ways, and without friendships we cannot become who we were meant to be. True, mature friendships, for example, see us both as we are and as we are capable of being, and they encourage us to become the better version of our selves (Simon 1997, 105). Left alone, we tend to think, we are already perfected; friends love us, but still expect better of us, and so we need friends to help us become who we ought to be. This interdependence is an integral part of our created nature (Simon 1997, 178). Simon is less anxious than

Meilaender about the potential dangers of friendship; she is interested in the ways that friendships are vital for a life that responds to God's calling.

A fourth concept of spiritual friendship is drawn from a sense of priority in friendship development. In contrast to other authors; Paul Wadell in his book; *Becoming Friends: Worship, Justice, and the Practice of Christian Friendship* does not offer a sustained philosophical analysis of the nature of friendship. Instead, he starts from the assumption that as Christians we should strive for friendship with God and draw out the implications of that relationship for the structure of our communities and worship (Wadell 2002, 21). Being friends with God, he notes, is not something one does alone; it involves membership within the community of friends of God—the church. We act as the friends of God by meeting together as the community of Christ and engaging in the liturgical practices that shape us into the sorts of friends of God who can act as we should in the world (Wadell 2002, 27). Wadell offers what we might consider a Catholic or universal perspective on friendship, emphasizing how worship done rightly shapes us in ways that go far deeper than mere intellectual assent (Wadell 2002, 129). Worship transforms our vision through its use of images, symbols, and metaphors (Wadell 2002, 128). As our vision is transformed, we find ourselves able to see others through Christ's eyes, to see them through eyes shaped by compassion and love rather than arrogance and selfishness, and thus to see them as they more truly are (Wadell 2002, 126).

Summary

This section of the research study emphasized four thinkers Carmichael, Meilaender, Simon, and Wadell: Each offering contrasting conceptions on friendship.

Each author provides an integral piece of insight that helped to formulate this research study. The first conception of spiritual friendship is related to the nature and limit of friendships. We are called to have a universal friendship-love; however, we need to be wise in the choosing of our friends (Carmichael 2004, 199). A second concept of spiritual friendship is linked to the destructive potential of friendships (Meilaender 1985, 32). If not careful, we may unknowingly cause personal emotional damage because of treating each person with the same universal friendship-love. The reality is that not everyone values and reciprocates friendship-love in the same manner. A third concept of spiritual friendship is drawn from the discernment of knowing who your friends are (Simon 1997, 23). True friendships are those that help us discover our purpose and help us become who we were meant to be. This can be misunderstood as a utilitarian point of view; however, if God is the author of friendships; there should be a personal purpose for the friendship. A fourth concept of spiritual friendship is drawn from a sense of priority in friendship development (Wadell 2002, 21). Friendships should be birthed out of our relationship with God—which is our first and highest priority. Being a part of an active community of believers enables us to see others through God's eyes. We are then connected to true friendships through a spiritual commonality.

Subject Demographic Conception of Spiritual Friendships

The aim of this section is to provide a demographic study of the selected age group and highlight the way friendships are conceptualized by and within this demographic group.

United States Statistics on Singleness

Today, there are more singles in the United States than at any time in history—99.6 million unmarried adults are age 18 and older, that yields 43.6 percent of the U.S. population, according to the 2010 U.S. Census. A total of 44.9 percent of unmarried adults age 18 and older are women. A total of 61 percent of adults in this demographic have never married; 23.8 percent of adults are divorced; and 14.4 percent of adults are widowed. A total of 31.4 million people live alone, which is 27 percent of all households; a 17 percent increase from 1970 (America's Families and Living Arrangements: 2010 U.S. Demographics).

National Study of Select Megachurches

The results of a 2008 national study conducted by the Leadership Network and the Hartford Seminary's Institute for Religion Research drew 24,900 responses from 12 carefully selected megachurches located across the United States. The study documented that nearly one-third of megachurch attendees are single and unmarried. The study also revealed that the vast majority of megachurch singles fall into the age category of 18–44 years old (Thumma and Bird 2009).

Subject Megachurch Statistics

As of February 2012, the selected megachurch for this study; Christ Church had 2,849 registered households, of which 929 are registered with a “single” marital status, representing 33 percent or one-third of the church. This seems to be consistent with the 12 megachurches studied in the 2008 national study conducted by the Leadership Network and the Hartford Seminary's Institute for Religion Research.

In order to serve the growing needs of the subject megachurch the age range for ministry is as follows; children's ministry; 0-12, youth ministry; 13-18, young adult/College ministry; 19-28, single adult ministry; 29-59 and senior adults 60+.

Congregational leadership experience has shown that individuals begin to take note of their marital status and romanticism as early as their senior year in high school. Thus, the single adult ministry; at times, may be frequented by individuals in their late teens. Most are not necessarily looking for a mate; but rather desire to learn about marriage. At the same time, individuals ages 45+ have either been involved in at least one serious relationship; perhaps cohabitated and even divorced. The majority of these individuals are learning about life after divorce, dating and relationships, and how to live out their singleness in light of their faith.

Singleness and Spiritual Friendships among Subject Megachurch

In order to capture the majority of singles at the subject megachurch; the researcher investigated unmarried, single adults in the age range of 18-45 years old. Through interviews, investigation and observations, the researcher highlighted the common ways friendships are conceptualized by this demographic, as follows:

Single's Adult Ministry Objectives

Megachurches have larger percentages of younger people and singles; they are wealthier and have more education when compared to the random sampling of Protestant churches (Bruce 2004). This fast paced and goal oriented demographic are clear regarding their use of time, and also their specific objectives for attending certain groups. The misconception among many individuals is that single adults are only seeking someone in whom to marry. In fact, the number one reason why they

would even want to attend a Single Adult Ministry (SAM); is for the opportunity to meet other Christian single adults, followed by a chance to develop friendships and lastly, a closer walk with God (Figure 3.1).

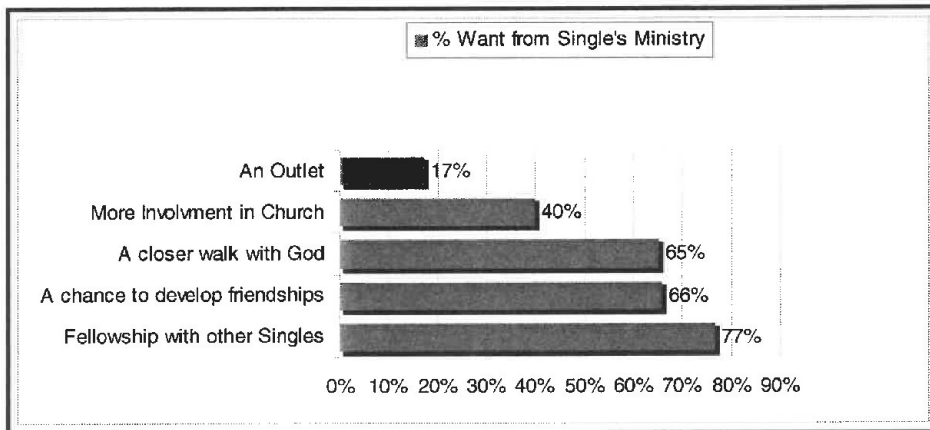


Figure 3.1. What single adults want most out of the Single's Ministry? (N=180).

Learning Opportunity

Churches think that unmarried congregants have different expectations about church, when what is often lacking in the church is an acknowledgment of the singles in their midst. The Bible has a lot to say about friendships and dating, marriage, and sexuality; but those are issues the churches do not readily teach on, as from a single adult's perspective. Singles do not want to feel stigmatized by the church and its activities. They have a genuine need to learn about marriage and interpersonal relationships. They want to be prepared to receive God's best for their life in terms of relationships, responsibilities, and finances. In fact, when asked about the top topics they would like to see taught in SAM and the church they mentioned in order of preference; marriage readiness, dating techniques and developing friendships (Figure 5.4).

Single's Small Groups

According to the national megachurch study, forty percent of attenders said they do not participate in any small group. Likewise, no particular type of small group garners more than 28% of attenders. Religious education and spiritual growth groups attracted approximately a quarter of megachurch attenders, while service, recovery and fellowship type small groups accounted for no more than 10% to 20% of attenders (Thumma and Bird, 2009). The Christ Church, 2012 Single's Ministry Survey revealed that 92.3% (181 of 215 respondents) are not currently attending a single's small group also known as a spiritual growth group. A total of 80.9% (144 of 178 respondents) indicated that they would be interested in attending one. Yet, when asked what they would like to see happen in a single's small group 70.2% (127 of 181 respondents) indicated that they would like to talk about relationships and dating; followed by integrating singleness within their Christian faith (Figure 1.3). This clearly shows that the emphasis of single's small groups from "spiritual" to "interpersonal" must be altered.

Self-disclosure Characteristics

In investigating this demographic, single adults desire healthy friendships and social lives. However, according to the results of the Christ Church, 2012 Single's Ministry Survey, 64.5% (120 of 186 respondents) admitted to not yet initiating friendships at this megachurch. In reflecting on the stages of the social penetration theory, the author realizes that most people cannot seem to get past the initial orientation stage. In the "orientation stage" verbal interaction is quite limited, and there is little hesitation in giving and probing for information, as long as it remains

superficial. This research study attempted to investigate why this occurred by interviewing ten friendship pairs. When asked what propelled self-disclosure in their friendship, 45% indicated their openness, 35% as genuine, and 20% non-judgmental (Table 5.6). In order to arrive at this stage, these friendships had to take a type of interpersonal risk that most are not willing to take.

Theoretical Background of the Study

The Social Penetration Theory

The Social Penetration Theory (SPT), developed by Altman and Taylor (1973), attempts to break down the process of interpersonal exchange and how friendships are formed. The SPT makes two hypotheses about interpersonal relationships. The first hypothesis states that “interpersonal exchange gradually progresses from superficial, non-intimate areas to more intimate, deeper layers of the selves of social actors” (Altman and Taylor 1973, 6). Meanwhile, the second hypothesis states that “people assess interpersonal rewards and costs, satisfaction and dissatisfaction, gained from interaction with others, and that the advancement of the relationship is heavily dependent on the amount and nature of the rewards and costs” (Altman and Taylor 1973, 6).

Most people do not tell the intimate details of their life stories during their first encounter with another person. Rather, deeper revelations about one’s life come gradually, as a person evaluates the advantages and disadvantages of a continued relationship. The evaluation of the rewards and costs of the relationship takes place constantly, not only at the beginning of the relationship, and continues long after the relationship has already been established.

Researchers have defined self-disclosure in several different ways. One such definition infers that self-disclosure is “an interaction between at least two individuals where one intends to deliberately divulge something to another” (Green, Derlega, and Mathews 2006, 411). Conversely, Sidney M. Jourard defines self-disclosure as “the act of making yourself manifest, showing yourself so that others can perceive you”—which can be an intentional or unintentional act (Jourard 1971, 19). In their theory, Altman and Taylor propose that discovering information about a person is like peeling away the layers of an onion (Altman and Taylor 1973, 17; Gouran 1994, 185). Figure 3.2 graphically shows an “onion” as the personality of the individual as being revealed by breadth and depth of willful self-disclosure. The breadth is the number of topics and interest areas of which the individual’s knowledge base consists, while the depth is the layers of that information (Altman and Taylor, 1973, 15–17; Gouran, 1994).

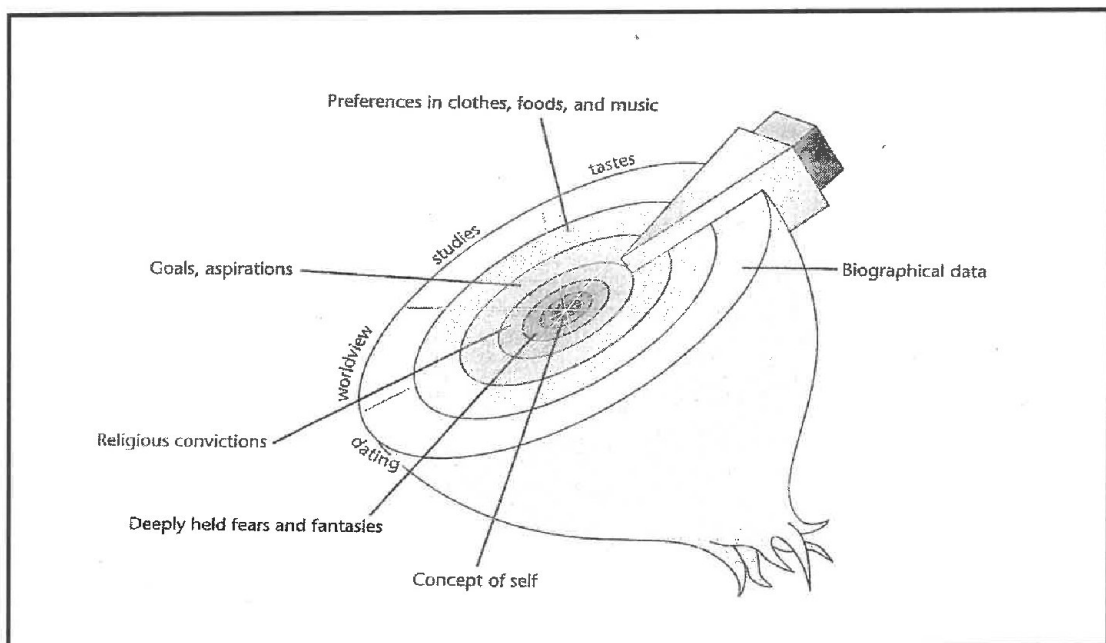


Figure 3.2. Categories of breadth and depth of self-disclosure. Illustration from Griffin, Emory A. 2006. *Communication: A first look at communication theory*. New York: McGraw-Hill College. 120.

Individuals may be willing to share certain details of their lives with just about anyone because they are not particularly significant or revealing. Yet, they will only share information that they consider private with someone once they have established trust in a given relationship. In fact, people will feel comfortable allowing layers to be peeled back so that they can reveal important personal information.

Another aspect of SPT is the idea that people make decisions regarding their relationships on a cost-and-rewards basis, meaning that individuals want to maximize rewards and minimize personal costs (Altman and Taylor 1973, 31; Sabatelli, Buck, and Dreyer 1982). This would indicate that in making choices about what to reveal, when to reveal it, and how to reveal it, individuals are considering the potential negative effects or positive outcomes; however, research indicates that this can change as friendships develop.

Based upon the SPT, the amount and type of disclosure within friendships will not only vary based upon how long the pair has been friends, but also depend on three major factors: (1) personal characteristics; (2) outcomes of exchange; and (3) situational context.

Personal Characteristics

Personal characteristics bear important aspects of how interpersonal relationships are formed and managed; these include personal, demographic, biographical, and sociocultural attributes.

Self-disclosure as a personality construct cannot overlook patterns of child-rearing practices and family interaction. Previous studies on ordinal positions of birth show that later-born children show higher self-disclosure scores than firstborns,

particularly because the former enjoy more interpersonal interaction opportunities (Dimond and Hellkamp 1969, 235–238; Dimond and Munz 1967, 829–833). Family relationships are more important in determining to whom a person discloses, rather than whether or not the person will be a high discloser. The findings of a study conducted by Doster and Strickland revealed that generally high disclosers perceive their parents as more nurturing as opposed to others, particularly the mother, who—in the eyes of low disclosers—is cold, distrustful, and selfish (Doster and Strickland 1969, 382).

One or more studies generally support the following. First, self-disclosure increases with age, and there is more disclosure to opposite-sex targets and gradually less to same-sex persons (Jourard 1961c, 191–197). Second, women tend to disclose more information about themselves than men (Jourard and Lasakow 1958, 91–98; Dimond and Munz 1967, 829–833). Third, Jewish men are significantly higher in disclosure than Baptist, Methodist, and Catholic men, none of which differed significantly from one another (Jourard 1961d, 446); presumably, any effects of religious background on disclosure are mediated by a closer family orientation. Finally, whites are higher self-revealers than blacks (Jourard and Lasakow 1958, 91–98). A recent study revealed that Latinos disclose more personal information to friends than acquaintances, and they disclose more to Latinos than to White American persons (Schwartz, Galliher, and Rodriguez 2011, 116–121). In cross-cultural findings, Americans disclose a great deal about themselves and make friends easily, while Germans do not disclose much information but become quite intimate with a few others (Lewin 1936, 265–293).

Outcomes of Exchange

The second broad category of the theory involves a description of the role of rewards and costs in the social penetration process. Interpersonal rewards and costs are motivational, in that rewards form the basis for maintaining or continuing a relationship to deeper levels of exchange, whereas costs lead to a widening down or dissolution of relationships. Since all relationships inevitably involve costs, parties typically evaluate costs relative to the rewards they may obtain. Therefore, the overall outcome of a relationship is a function of both its rewards and its costs. The premise is that relationship outcome equals rewards minus costs. Relationships proceed from non-intimate to intimate areas of exchange. The rate and amount of movement from non-intimate to intimate areas of exchange—which includes verbal disclosure, type of activities engaged in, and nonverbal communication—are determined by reward/cost factors of past, present, and projected future exchanges. Social penetration theory emphasizes reward/cost factors, and is thus similar to social exchange theory (e.g., Homans 1961; Thibaut and Kelley 1959). The combined formulations of rewards and costs by Thibaut and Kelley and by Homans have been incorporated into social penetration theory in five propositions: (1) *reward/cost ratios*: this refers to the balance of positive and negative experiences in a social relationship (i.e., the relative number of rewards to costs). Rewards and costs are consistently associated with mutual satisfaction of social and personal needs. Predicting how satisfied one will be in a relationship is based upon past experiences. Outcomes received in past experiences are often critical to knowing and understanding the kinds of outcomes expected in the future. (2) *Absolute reward and cost properties* involve the absolute

magnitude of positive and negative experiences in a relationship; assuming a similar ratio of favorable to unfavorable experiences, a greater absolute magnitude of rewards should yield a fast-growing, more intimate relationship. (3) *Immediately obtained rewards and costs* refer to the set of rewards and costs that accrue from a finite, temporally bound, relatively immediate social interaction. (4) *Forecast rewards and costs* are projections of future rewards and costs; a component of forecasting includes a comparison of the present relationship to some standard, or to alternative relationships. (5) *Cumulative reward and costs* encompass the accumulation of rewards and costs throughout the history of a dyad. If exchange processes are sustained or increased over time, individuals must be “profiting” from the relationship (Altman and Taylor 1973, 32–33).

Situational Context

The third broad category of social penetration theory involves the development of social bonds affected by environmental or situational contexts. Situational factors that can have a considerable impact on the interpersonal encounters and relationships are: (1) *physical proximity or closeness*. A study demonstrated that people, who lived more closely to one another in an apartment development, using the same stairways and utility rooms, were friendlier and interacted more often (Festinger, Schachter, and Black 1950). (2) *Situational dimensions (i.e., formality, confinement, and interdependence)* reveal that the degree of formality in a situation dictates that the social penetration process will be slowed. A social isolation study demonstrated how physical confinement was associated with accelerated rates of self-disclosure, particularly in intimate areas of exchange, where disclosure to an isolation partner, initially a stranger, reached levels normally

achieved with a close friend (Altman and Haythorn 1965, 411–426). The more a situation involves interdependence among group members, the more extensive the social penetration process will be. Thus, such factors as privacy, length of time people are together, and the opportunity to leave the setting are all factors of disclosure within the social penetration theory.

Summary

This section introduced the social penetration theory as a process of interpersonal exchange that gradually progresses from superficial, non-intimate areas to more intimate, deeper layers of the selves of the social actors. However, social bonds do not grow and then stabilize forever. Some reach plateaus and then grow further; others become undesirable and either break up or revert to an earlier level of intimacy of exchange. We also discussed three factors in which growth of interpersonal relationships are hastened or restrained.

Theoretical Interpretation of Study

Self-disclosure in Disciplines

Self-disclosure may be defined as any information about himself that Person A communicates verbally to a Person B. The basic parameters of self-disclosure are: a) breadth or amount of information disclosed, b) depth or intimacy of information disclosed, and c) duration or time spent describing each item of information. Self-disclosure as an aspect of communication is critical in developing and maintaining interpersonal relationships. While self-disclosure is used to measure interpersonal relationships, how has it or the lack thereof affected other disciplines? While the aspect of self-disclosure is used throughout various disciplines, the aim of this section

of the literature review is to highlight the effects of self-disclosure within the mental health, education, and business environments.

Self-disclosure in Mental Health

Psychologists have long been interested in the topic of loneliness related to interpersonal relationships. There is a realization that loneliness has and continues to be a serious and widespread problem in the United States today (Rubenstein, Shaver, and Peplau 1979, 58–65). Loneliness is a cognitive aspect that concludes that a person has fewer initial social relationships than desired or expected. A study showed that, in a college student population, loneliness has been found to be associated with more time spent alone, fewer dates, fewer close friends, and less time spent with close friends (Russell, Peplau, and Cutrona 1980, 472–480). Coming from a social skills perspective, one factor that may be particularly important is self-disclosure. Research on self-disclosure has indicated that the ability to reveal one's feelings and thoughts to another is a basic skill for developing and maintaining normal social relationships (Altman and Taylor 1973). Jourard has shown that one loses his mental health because he avoids becoming known by another human being. Self-disclosure to at least one other human being is both an indication of personality health and a means of ultimately achieving a healthy personality (Jourard 1971a). Within the sector of mental health and counseling, when treating loneliness, a basic assumption is that the relationship that the counselor establishes with the client is the most significant aspect of counseling. Such a relationship depends upon the presence or absence of trust (Friedlander 1970, 387–400; Griffin 1967, 104–120). The development of trust is essential for the cooperative interaction and productive work involved in effective

counseling relationships (Johnson and Noonan 1972, 411–416). The findings of the study revealed that black persons disclosed less information than whites (Jourard and Lasakow 1958). The failure to self-disclose and to trust others has been cited as a barrier to effectively counseling black clients (Vontress 1969, 11–17). The observations have led to an investigation of a peer-counseling model instead of traditional counseling techniques for African-American clients (Williams 1974, 522–525). The issue of self-disclosure is paramount within the mental health industry.

Self-disclosure in Education

Self-disclosure among educators is one of the most effective tools in the learning environment. Scholars of academic teaching and learning agree that self-disclosure is increasingly needed, effective, and popular in the current climate of higher education. Self-disclosure among educators allows for the bridging of the gaps between the personal and the academic. Engaging the skill of self-disclosure makes for better teaching and, in turn, helps students to become better learners. If practiced with awareness and care, the strength of personal disclosure can contribute to such positive classroom qualities as trust, safety, connection, empowerment, and community (Kashtan 2005, 573). These vital qualities can only emerge, however, when teachers are able to distinguish between their own personal reactions to their self-disclosure and the reactions that come from their audience. Without the skill to navigate between reactions from oneself and others, teachers may lose direction, become too familiar, and become less effective.

Teachers' self-disclosure creates a positive interpersonal atmosphere, which in turn increases the level and quality of student participation (Goldstein and Benassi

1994, 212). When educators are able to properly self-disclose, they can make the study material more attractive to students and help them to identify its relevance. When students are able to hear the self-disclosure of their teachers, they become more interested to read, write, and discuss topics with full reference to their experiences, including painful ones (Holdstein and Bleich 2001, 18). Students are then better able to endorse the connection between the coursework, subject, and teacher (Freedman 2001, 199). The drawback to the educator's ability to self-disclose causes the reaction for students to self-disclose. Self-disclosure makes students vulnerable at deep levels, often provoking the release of repressed and painful emotions (Kompf 1993, 527). While it may, superficially, seem positive for students to self-disclose, the reality is that it may pose a harmful and possible unethical situation. Educators must consider ways to support and protect students against harmful reactions from their own self-disclosure. Self-disclosure is widely used and is a valuable tool for both the educator and student; but it must be used with caution and sparingly (Ejsing 2007, 235–243).

Self-disclosure in Business

Disclosure of personal information for the express purpose of forming high-quality relationships in the workplace is a fundamental challenge (Collins and Miller 1994, 457–475). Research reveals that high-quality relationships in the workplace are important because they are associated with trust, respect, and a willingness to share information, resources, and perspectives (Blatt and Camden 2006, 243–264; Brass 1984, 518–539). Disclosure is a basic mechanism by which people manage their relationships with others in the workplace. Scholars have argued that people disclose positive information about themselves strategically to enhance their professional

image in the eyes of others (Leary and Kowalski 1990, 34–47; Rubin, Rubin, and Martin 1993, 115–127; Schlenker and Weigold 1992, 133–168). Despite the perceived benefits of disclosing personal information in the workplace, research on boundary theory provides an important theoretical perspective. This research suggests that not all employees see the benefits of disclosing personal information in work settings (Ashforth, Kreiner, and Fugate 2000, 472–491). The study found the primary reasons that people fail to disclose personal information at work are to prevent such information from ruining others' perceptions of their competence or suitability for their professional roles. Importantly, this choice is not about presenting a false image; rather, it is simply choosing to enact different aspects of one's true self in separate domains. Choosing to conceal personal information means that the individual will present a more limited version of himself; but, one that is still authentic in a given context. Self-disclosure in the workplace is a personal decision that ultimately depends upon the motives of the employee and his or her willingness to be vulnerable and transparent in the pursuit of high-quality workplace relationships.

Summary

The social penetration process utilizing self-disclosure within interpersonal relationships has been theorized by many social psychologists for decades. It continues to be used within various sectors of society and disciplines as a tool in understanding how self-disclosure can be employed either positively or negatively. This section highlighted three sectors of society in which self-disclosure is used.

Theoretical Application of Study

Complexities in the Initial Phase of Spiritual Friendships

The literature review specifically points back to the problem statement indicated earlier. The 2008 study of 12 selected megachurches from across the United States (Thumma and Bird 2009) indicated that the percentage of close friendships among single adults in the church dropped from 54% for those attending the church for less than 1 year to 27% for those who have attended for more than 10 years. The notion that the longer one attends a megachurch, the likelihood that one will increase the number of one's friendships may indeed prove to be false. The initial friendship phase is complex, involving a series of interactions that, if undergone in a successful manner, will lead to a meaningful friendship; however, many variables still exist. To link this review with the problem statement, the author will discuss three aspects of the initial friendship phase: familiarity, rewards and costs, and finally, interpersonal trust. Of course, there are other variables associated with friendship development, but these are not part of this review and study.

Familiarity

An individual's attraction to another is no doubt the most frequent cause of voluntary attempts to initiate interaction with the other. In any setting, attraction to the other person is the guiding force in which we decide to engage in any discourse. The most basic principle of attraction is familiarity. As opposed to the unfamiliar, familiar people usually are judged to be safe and unlikely to cause harm. The results of a study found that people are more likely to initiate relationships with people in close physical proximity than they are with people even a short distance away (Segal

1974, 654–657). Not only does physical proximity usually facilitate ease of initiating interaction, but it increases familiarity with the other prior to the interaction attempt. For example, a study found that the more an individual has seen but not interacted with another, the more likely he or she is to choose to interact with that person (Brockner and Swap 1976, 531–540). There is also evidence that familiarity may be antagonistic to individuals' ability to inspire sexual desire in their partners (Berscheid 1985, 413–484). While there is no precedent research, this may partly explain why, over time, church attenders become disinterested once they have become familiar with each other—at least from a romantic standpoint. The authors of a recent article proposed that familiarity tends to breed dislike because familiarity, which they defined as acquiring more information about another person, tends to disconfirm assumptions about another person's similarity to oneself. Ambiguity of information about oneself tends to breed liking (Norton, Frost, and Ariely 2007, 97–105). The aspect of “familiarity” in the initial phase of friendship development has proven to be a rather complex issue.

The complexity of familiarity is exacerbated by the mystery of receiving the Spirit of God upon conversion. The Apostle Paul noted we know that we are children of God because we received the Spirit brought about through a spiritual adoption, in which we are now heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ (Romans 8:14, NIV). This spiritual adoption is evident when believers are joined together in one place, particularly in worship. Believers are aware of other believers because of the familiarity of the Spirit of God within them. This is an aspect that draws people together—a sense that we are familiar with the unified Spirit within ourselves. This

unified Spirit in itself causes a unique social attraction to other persons that would not otherwise take place. This familiarity is what allows individuals to be unabashedly transparent during their worship experiences. It seems that the more frequently individuals are able to worship together, the more familiar they become and the more they are willing to disclose themselves to the other person.

Rewards and Costs

The next complexity in the initial friendship stage stems from the newly formed dyad's ability to try and predict the outcome of a friendship before it even takes place. Humans seem to possess an innate ability to "size a person up" to determine whether the other person is worthy of pursuing a friendship. This ability has been heavily studied by two psychologists, John Thibaut and Harold Kelley, in their social exchange theory. They believe that, when a dyad first meets, each party mentally gauges the potential rewards and costs of friendship.

In their definition of interpersonal rewards and costs, *rewards* refer to the pleasures, satisfactions, and gratifications the person enjoys; and *costs* refer to any factor that operates to inhibit or deter the friendship. For instance, cost is high when great physical or mental effort is required, or when there are conflicting forces in the friendship (Thibaut and Kelley 1959, 12–13). In the example of a church attendee, he may desire someone to talk to, eat with, and hang around with (rewards); but the downside to getting to know the other person is that he may need to reveal some of his inner life that the other person may condemn, ridicule, or scoff (costs) at, including his faith in God. While we can surmise based on social behavior that this occurs, there has not been any precedent research on the study of church attendees

and this type of behavior. Throughout their lives, both researchers (Thibaut and Kelley) studied the key concepts of social exchange—relational outcome, relational satisfaction, and relational stability. Rewards and costs within interpersonal relationships have been studied by several theorists. For instance, Schutz described interpersonal rewards and costs under the rubric of “compatibility,” which he defined as a relationship that leads to mutual satisfaction and harmonious co-existence (Schutz 1958). Newcomb deals with rewards in the context of “attraction,” described in terms of three variants: respect, trust, and liking (Newcomb 1956). Bennis described rewards and costs from the standpoint of the person’s “feelings,” (i.e., love, hate, etc.) toward the other person (Bennis 1964). Another aspect is to view rewards and costs of feeling loved or providing love as rewards, and stress and worry about the relationship as costs (Safilios-Rothschild 1976, 355–362). Social exchange theory is one of the most commonly used frameworks for exploring close relationships. The core idea of social exchange models is that individuals in all relationships are driven by efforts to maximize rewards and minimize costs.

The motivation that leads one to establish friendship is thus, presumably, the gain of such “rewards” and “benefits.” From this perspective, most individuals’ conscious aim, as a fully rational being, is to maximize self-interest. It is for the sake of these “rewards” that one may generally enter into friendship. In the church environment, the rewards may be as simple as the friendship rewards gained through discipleship, personal mentoring, or character development. In this religious environment, there seems to be a constant mental gauging of rewards and costs that cannot be ignored by the spiritual leaders as a legitimate ingredient in the initial

formation of friendships. Since theorists Irwin Altman and Dalmas Taylor believe that principles of social exchange accurately predict when people will risk self-disclosure, this study will address the aspect of rewards and costs in greater detail later in the literature review.

Interpersonal Trust

Trust is necessary for people to live together, cooperate with each other, and coordinate their efforts and behaviors. On a daily basis, people encounter numerous interdependent social situations in which trust is essential. However, because others' behaviors are to some extent unpredictable, interdependent situations necessarily involve some degree of uncertainty. Will Mary, who works in the Pastoral Care department in the church, cooperate, will she act selfishly, or will she try to hurt me? Uncertainty and risk are intrinsic properties of interdependent situations; thus, in order to function in social contexts and to maintain healthy friendships, people need to trust that the other person will act favorably toward them. Nonetheless, not everybody is trustworthy. Why do people trust certain friends more than others? How do they know whom to trust? Trust is integral to a host of social interactions and, accordingly, has been studied across disciplines, including economics, medicine, law, religion, sociology, and psychology.

The third complexity to the initial friendship development phase is in fact "interpersonal trust." Trust involves the juxtaposition of peoples' loftiest hopes and aspirations in relation to their deepest worries and fears. It may be the most important ingredient for the development and maintenance of happy, well-functioning relationships (Simpson 2007, 587–607). Trust captures the degree to which

individuals believe they can count on their current relationship partners to meet their most fundamental needs and to facilitate their most important goals. According to Kramer's review of the trust literature, "a concise and universally accepted definition has remained elusive" (Kramer 1999, 571). For instance, trust is defined as "the willingness to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party" (Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman 1995, 712). Another definition is "a willingness to increase your vulnerability to another person whose behavior you cannot control, in a situation in which your potential benefit is much less than your potential loss if the other person abuses your vulnerability" (Zand 1997, 91). Review of the trust literature in multiple disciplines has led to the following definition: "a psychological state comprising of the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another" (Rousseau, Sitkin, and Camerer 1998, 395). Although these definitions vary, they all conceptualize trust as the willingness to make oneself vulnerable to another party, combined with a hope or expectation of positive outcomes. A study found that trust precipitated by a sense of vulnerability predicted love and self-disclosure (Larzelere and Huston 1980, 595–604). Vulnerability is a key factor in determining self-disclosure among adults, particularly single adults.

Summary

There is a considerable amount of variables associated with the establishment, development, and maturity of interpersonal relationships. The intention of this section of the literature review is to highlight three aspects of interpersonal relationships—

familiarity, rewards and costs, and interpersonal trust—as the potential driving forces behind low levels of friendship development within the church. The researcher will continue to develop a framework that will lead to the discussion of self-disclosure.

Spiritual Friendships in Context of Social Penetration Theory

The social penetration theory states that as relationships develop, communication moves from relatively shallow, non-intimate levels to deeper, more personal ones. This is a scientific theory that makes predictions about relationship development that are based on levels of self-disclosure. Based on a sort of cost-reward model, this theory argues that for a relationship to develop, both parties must engage in self-disclosure.

However, how does this theory apply to spiritual friendships? One might logically expect committed Christians in spiritual friendships to exhibit relational communication skills. Self-disclosure's value for the committed Christian lies in its necessity for fellowship. One cannot really become a group or church member and remain autonomous. In essence, the more time we spend with others, the more likely we are to self-disclose more intimate thought and details of our lives. However, the reality is that every Christian is on a different spiritual journey and possesses varied sets of attitudes, personalities, and challenges. The benefits of interpersonal relationships are not embraced as priorities in every Christian. The church, sometimes referred to as the "spiritual hospital," is composed of people who have suffered relational hurts, family disappointments, and personal consequences that do not enable them to take on the challenge of spiritual friendships more readily. There is a realization that interpersonal relationships are created through a series of

developmental stages that require patience, trust, and risk in self-disclosure. In their theory, Altman and Taylor categorize specific behaviors into a series of workable developmental stages within the social penetration process (Altman and Taylor 1973, 135–141). The goal of this section is to describe these stages in light of spiritual friendships within the perceived church environment. It is understood that this is a theoretical approach to the application of this study, and further data with accompanying outcomes are still warranted.

Stages of the Social Penetration Process

Stage 1: Orientation

The earliest stage of interaction is postulated to occur at the periphery of personality in “public” areas. Within the church environment, guests or frequent visitors who have yet to connect socially will agree to attend a small group meeting or non-threatening social gathering. At these meetings, they only make a small part of themselves accessible to others. Their responses are not very rich or broad, and they are often cloaked in Christian clichés or socially desirable modes of response. In dress and manner, they attempt to convey a conservative, favorable image and handle themselves in a way that is appropriate to the cultural and Christian norms of the situation. They smile graciously and easily, are quick to nod agreement and understanding, offer greetings without hesitation, and exhibit a range of behaviors to present the image of a pleasant, understanding, and likeable person.

The content of verbal interaction during this initial stage is quite limited, and there is little hesitation in giving and probing for information, as long as it remains superficial. At this stage, people also tend to not evaluate one another openly,

especially in a negative manner. There is a general reluctance to criticize and, if done, it is usually in a gentle and non-judgmental fashion. Within nonverbal levels, negative reactions such as frowns, signs of displeasure, and negative head nods are discouraged.

Either before or after the church worship service—meeting someone for the first time—exchanging pleasantries that lead to private layers of personality can become uncomfortable for some. Responses are apt to be restricted, with evidence of discomfort and even attempts to leave the situation. In these situations, people have learned to terminate conversations in socially graceful ways, such as stating they need to go to a restroom, noticing an old friend across the room who has not been greeted, or delicately bringing another person into the conversation. The overall tone of this stage is caution and tentativeness.

Stage 2: Exploratory Affective Exchange

This stage represents an expansion of richness of communication in public-outer areas. Aspects of personality that were guarded earlier are now revealed in more detail; and, while still cautious, there is less emphasis upon caution. Christian catch phrases (i.e., God bless you, brother/sister, etc.), certain glances, and friendly facial expressions come to hold a particular meaning of sincerity.

There is a greater degree of willingness to evaluate and to be evaluated by the other person. This is exhibited by conversations about their spiritual journeys; how they arrived at this junction of their lives; or how they became interested in this particular church. However, all this self-disclosure is still largely in the superficial layers of personality. Although some movement toward intermediate areas has begun,

interaction in more private or central areas is still extremely limited and avoided or handled with reserve. Relationships at this stage are generally friendly, relaxed, and casual; commitments are still limited and temporary. Many relationships, particularly within the church environment, probably do not proceed beyond this stage.

Stage 3: Affective Exchange

This stage characterizes close friendships or courtship relationships, in which people know one another well and share a fairly extensive history of association. Exchange is freewheeling and loose, and the parties enjoy and are comfortable with one another. These individuals move smoothly through a variety of interactions with many areas of their personalities willingly made accessible to one another. Interaction is also spontaneous and voluntary, and one party is fully assured that the other will respond in a voluntary way. In this stage of closeness, criticism or praise, hostility or love, and approval or disapproval at the outer layers are given quite easily and without any thought of threat to the relationship as a whole. Individuals come to explore and interact with one another in more personal areas. Barriers are being broken; dyad members are learning a great deal about one another and are coming to see one another as unique individuals; however, there are still some elements of caution and restrictiveness to areas that may cause dyad members to view each other's Christian walk in a negative manner, such as sexuality, doctrinal interpretation (i.e., drinking, make-up, etc.), or past sinful behavior that may alter their friend's current interpretation or reputation regarding them.

Stage 4: Stable Exchange

Achieved in only a few relationships, development in growing relationships is characterized by continuous openness and richness across all layers of personality. Both public communication and private communication become efficient—dyad members know one another well and can reliably interpret and predict the feelings and probable behaviors of the other. They are able to finish each other's sentences and are able to accurately interpret nonverbal cues from the other. They are more willing to allow each other to use, have access to, or know about very private apparel, belongings, and intimate behaviors. They are extremely comfortable with each other, and are continually encouraging one another in their Christian journey, they are always seen together, and a day does not go by without some form of verbal or electronic interaction.

Summary

The social penetration process, no matter how many stages, does not always proceed in a smooth fashion. An interpersonal relationship undergoes spurts, slowdowns, plateaus, sudden new upward cycles, and long periods of stability. The behaviors and feelings of another person, however close, are to some degree unpredictable. Therefore, the process should never be considered a fixed beginning point and a fixed ending point. Two people may not continue to learn more about one another through self-disclosure, or the relationship may not even move forward on all dimensions of the social penetration process.

Conclusion

This chapter began by providing general and subject demographic conceptions of spiritual friendships. Also, the researcher introduced and examined the relevant literature pertaining to the social penetration theory as a multi-stage phenomenon that cuts across many levels of interpersonal functioning. Self-disclosure as a vehicle in which interpersonal relationships are enhanced was explored in the contexts of a number of disciplines. The researcher also highlighted the complexities of the initial friendship phase in light of spiritual friendships. Finally, a generic description of the social penetration process according to four stages of development was given, utilizing spiritual friendships within a church environment as a contextual view.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT DESIGN

Introduction

Numerous studies by social scientists and church growth professionals have examined the direct correlation between social development and church attendance. This descriptive study investigated the phenomenon regarding the formation and sustainability of friendships in a megachurch congregation. An investigation of how friendships develop, mature, and decline enhances the congregational leaders' abilities to lead or to communicate more effectively about the relational atmosphere of the church, its activities, and functions.

In chapter 1 the researcher provided the statement of the problem, significance of the study, research questions, and the scope of the study, limitations, definitions of the study, and selected megachurch for the study. In chapter 2 the researcher provided a theological framework highlighting God's involvement in the process of friendship development. First, it reviewed the biblical theological perspective of friendship from the New Testament standpoint. Second, the researcher built a case on the theological importance on interpersonal relationships through four distinct doctrinal lenses—each showing God's intentionality for interpersonal relationships. In chapter 3 representative literature review was presented outlining the stages of interpersonal relationships supported by the Social Penetration Theory. The theoretical framework was formed utilizing the social penetration theory as the foundation of friendship development. This theory posits that interpersonal exchange gradually progresses from superficial, non-intimate areas to more intimate, deeper layers of the selves of social actors (Altman and

Taylor 1973, 6). To illustrate, the researcher selected three disciplines within the areas of mental health, education, and business to highlight the effects and importance of self-disclosure. The theory categorizes specific behaviors into a series of workable developmental stages within the social penetration process. Lastly, an application was formed that described these developmental stages in light of spiritual friendship within the church environment.

Practical Theology

Practical theology consists of several related sub-fields: applied theology, which incorporates missions, evangelism, pastoral psychology or the psychology of religion; and includes church growth, administration, homiletics, spiritual formation, pastoral theology, spiritual direction, spiritual theology, and political theology, theology of justice and peace and similar areas. A working definition of practical theology is “critical theological reflection on the practices of the Church; as they interact with the practices of the world, with a view to ensuring and enabling faithful participation in God’s redemptive practices in, to and for the world” (Swinton and Mowat 2006, 6).

The initial practical theological phase investigated the current situation of friendship development of the subject megachurch. This task is termed, “spirituality of presence,” matter of attending to what is going on in the lives of individuals, families, and congregations (Osmer 2008, 33). The key term here is “attending,” relating to others with openness, attentiveness, and prayerfulness. In the same way, this qualitative study conducted personal interviews through the use of a strategy Osmer calls, “priestly listening” (Osmer 2008, 35). When the leader engages in priestly listening, they will therefore do so on behalf of the congregation as a whole.

In light of the research design the researcher combined practical theology with the qualitative research method in order to arrive at revised current practice (Table 4.1.). Similar to Osmer's four frame approach to practical theology, the first stage involved investigating the nature of the situation. However, in this case the aim was to determine what "appears" to be going on. Second stage, the researcher engaged the knowledge gained from the current praxis with the theoretical knowledge of the social penetration theory. Third, the researcher reflected on the theological perspective of the information gained. Lastly, the researcher combined all gathered information to produce new and challenging forms of practice that enable the initial situation to be transformed into ways which are authentic and faithful (Swinton and Mowat 2006, 94–97).

Table 4.1. Swinton and Mowat's Framework Linking Practical Theology with Qualitative Method

Qualitative Task	Current Praxis	Cultural/Contextual	Theological	Revised Practice
Question	What appears to be going on reflectively?	What is actually going on here?	How do we understand based on critical faithfulness?	How can we produce new practice to the situation?

This table was made with information taken from Swinton, J., and H. Mowat. 2006. *Practical theology and qualitative research*. London: SCM Press.

Research Strategy

This mixed methods descriptive study utilized both qualitative and quantitative data. While the qualitative data was weighted heavier; the quantitative data provided supplemental data useful for the final analysis. The data was collected in a sequential manner; and conclusions and recommendations utilized a convergence among both results.

There are generally six types of strategies of qualitative research (Creswell 1998, 9–11). In order to study the megachurch investigated in this research project, a case study approach was selected. A definition of a case study is “[a]n empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin 1994, 13). It is also defined as a study of people in their natural settings reported in the form of an explicit analysis of a single subject (Frey, Botan, and Kreps 2000). A common characteristic of the case study is its descriptive nature, which allows the end product to have depth and richness of information. A case study design is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved. The interest is in understanding process, rather than confirmation. To explore this case in an in-depth manner the researcher relied on multiple sources of information; including interviews and also a brief survey. This provided detailed descriptions of events and activities in order to provide a richly textured picture of the case.

Qualitative Design

This section of the research study is devoted to providing a description of the design and methods used for the study. Qualitative research means developing a description of the setting, analyzing themes and finally making an interpretation or drawing conclusions about its meaning. The steps below highlight a qualitative design that is germane in gathering data for the study.

Step 1: Participant Selection

In order to study the interpersonal relationships within this megachurch, the researcher selected a random group of ten friendship pairs (dyads) from among its church

membership base. The friendship dyads selected for this study consisted of six (6) pairs of women and four (4) pairs of men of the same gender, each initiating their friendships while attending the subject megachurch. In arriving at the sample pairs the following actions were taken by the researcher: (a) downloaded church membership data; filtering data germane to the “single” marital status; (b) narrowed the search by randomly selecting a population of one hundred single adults that met the selection criteria.

Step 2: Participant Invitation

Utilizing the one hundred randomly selected names that met the selection criteria; the researcher underwent an invitation process as follows: (a) sent via electronic mail to this randomly selected group, describing the nature of the study and their interest in participation; (b) the participant was asked to identify the other individual with whom they are friends; (c) those who acknowledged agreement to participate; the researcher sent via electronic mail the Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary’s Informed Consent Document (Appendix A) for their review; (d) each participant was given a time frame for acceptance and then an interview was scheduled that was convenient for both parties.

Step 3: Pre-Interview Preparation

Prior to the start of each interview the researcher ensured the following; (a) a hard copy of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary’s Informed Consent Document was distributed to both individuals; (b) each participant was asked to sign the consent form to ensure he or she has given permission to participate; (c) Each participant was given an alias number for use on the data gathered; no personal identifiers were collected from the participants.

Step 4: Interviews

The researcher interviewed ten (10) friendship dyads in the following manner: (a) all interviews were held in a small conference room located in the church facility in order to provide each participant with a sense of familiarity with his or her surroundings. The researcher ensured that there were no external distractions during the interview process; (b) an observational protocol was recorded, such as; consent of the participants, date and time of interview, place and location, and socio-demographic information about the participant (c) the researcher audio recorded each interview and field notes were taken in the event the audiocassette recorder malfunctioned; (d) all interviews lasted less than one hour for each friendship dyad.

Step 5: Post Interview Procedures

At the conclusion of all interviews the researcher ensured the following; (a) the audio recordings were transcribed into written text within thirty days from the end of the last interview; (b) the transcriptions in its entirety were read several times, until patterns, themes, and classifications emerged; (c) Microsoft Excel was used to code the data—no analysis software was used (i.e., NVIVO! or SPSS).

Qualitative Strategy

The qualitative strategy utilized for this research study was “in-depth interviewing.” In-depth interviewing is a data collection method relied on quite extensively by qualitative researchers. Described as, “a conversation with a purpose” (Kahn and Cannell 1957, 149). The qualitative research interview seeks to describe the meanings of central themes in the lives of the subjects. The researcher used the standardized, open-ended interview approach. In order to maximize the effectiveness of

the interview the researcher's role was to skillfully introduce pertinent questions and to spend the majority of time listening to each interviewee's responses (Creswell 1998, 125). The main task in interviewing is to understand the meaning of what the interviewees are saying (Kvale 1996).

Purpose of Interview Questions

The researcher developed a series of open-ended questions (Appendix B-Friendship Interview) which pointed back to Richard Osmer's four-framework approach to Practical Theology (Table 1.1).

The descriptive-empirical task is a process of gathering information that helps to discern patterns and dynamics in particular episodes, situations or contexts (Osmer 2008, 4). The data results of questions 1-6 answered the question; "What is going on?"

Questions 1-6: Making Friends

1. How did you become friends with the following individual?
2. What value do you place on developing friendships in the church?
3. Do you find it easier or harder to develop friendships at this church?
4. What are the main qualities you look for in a friendship?
5. How are spiritual friends different from non-spiritual friends?
6. What level of importance do you attach to this friendship based on frequency of social interaction (i.e., dinner engagements, regularity of conversations, etc.)?

The interpretive task is the drawing on theories of the arts and sciences to better understand and explain why these patterns and dynamics are occurring (Osmer 2008, 83). The data results of questions 7-13 answered the question; "Why is it going on?" Utilizing the social penetration theory as a backdrop the researcher was able to extract data that

addresses three major themes: (1) stages of social penetration theory; (2) self-disclosure in spiritual friendships; and (3) cost and rewards of spiritual friendships.

Questions 7-8: Social Penetration Stage

7. In what friendship stage are you currently: (1) casual acquaintance; (2) close friendship; or (3) very close friendship (i.e., able to or have disclosed very private areas of your life)?
8. What are two main themes (i.e., religious convictions, dating, goals, fears, fantasies, or preferences in clothes, food, and music) that you have disclosed with your friend that you wouldn't have disclosed during the earlier stages of your friendship?

Questions 9-11: Self-disclosure

9. What propels you to self-disclose more to your friend? Or what characteristics does your friend have that made it easier to self-disclose more?
10. Do you feel compelled to reciprocate self-disclosure once your friend reveals himself to you?
11. What sort of topics would you be willing to disclose to your spiritual friend that you wouldn't disclose to a non-spiritual (church) friend?

Questions 12-13: Cost and Rewards

12. Are your friendships mutually rewarding? If so, how?
13. What are two changes or ideas that this church can do in order to make friendship development easier and how can the church help support and help you sustain friendships, if any?

Confidentiality of Data

Records of participation in this research project were kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. In order to ensure that there were no breaches in confidentiality, the personal interviews were conducted solely by the primary researcher. For the purpose of this study, the participant was given an alias name/number (i.e., interviewee A or B). The answers that were provided will never be linked with their real names. The

interviews were audio recorded, and the interviewer took notes. All interview recordings and data was maintained on an encrypted USB drive and locked in a personal file cabinet. The audio recordings was transcribed by an outside private transcription service that is unaffiliated with the church. The researcher then secured all audio recordings, transcription documents, and personal interview notes in a safe and confidential place. Results of the interview will never be shared in whole or in part with others or with any leader of the church. In the event of any report or publication from this study, the researcher will not disclose the identity of the participants.

Conclusion

This chapter began by providing an overview of the practical theological phase which investigated the current situation of friendship development of the subject megachurch. The researcher then highlighted that a “case study” was used as the basis for the research strategy. This section of the research study was also devoted to providing a qualitative design showing a description of the design and methods used for the study. Lastly, the researcher discussed the qualitative strategy utilized for this research study, which entailed the use of an “in-depth interviewing” process.

CHAPTER 5

OUTCOMES

Introduction

The researcher analyzed the interview data against the social penetration theory in order to interpret the data for patterns, themes, and classifications before finally reporting the study's findings. These themes, along with biblical and theological truths, provided an understanding of the formation and sustainability of friendships in a megachurch congregation.

This mixed methods descriptive study utilized both qualitative and quantitative data. While the qualitative data was weighted heavier, the quantitative data provided supplemental data useful for the final analysis. The data was collected in a sequential manner, and the conclusions and recommendations utilized a convergence of both results.

The quantitative method used a brief online survey which was administered to single adults at the subject megachurch; Christ Church, New Jersey. The survey was developed and administered through "Survey Monkey," a private American company that enables users to create their own web-survey. The survey consisted of six categories, which included background demographical information, topics of interest, retreats, friendship development, and contact information (Appendix C). A total of 215 single adults completed the survey.

The qualitative method used for this study, included "in-depth interviews" as the data collection method. This enabled the researcher to derive at a closer, more accurate understanding of the existing degrees and levels of friendship commitments (Appendix B). A total of six female and four male dyads participated in the in-depth interviews.

Demographics of Study

Quantitative Demographics

The study entailed the development and implementation of an online ministry survey. The survey consisted of six categories, which included background demographical information, topics of interest, retreats, friendship development, and contact information. The survey was mailed electronically to an estimated 929 registered single adults (i.e., frequent visitors, inquirers, pending members and full members) of which 693 represented full-fledged members ages 25 to 59. Of the 693 registered single adults, 215 responded and completed the survey; reflecting a 31% retention rate at the moment of data analysis. Additionally, of the 215 single adults who completed the survey 17.4% were males and 82.6% were females. The age ranges of the participants were 25-29 (15.9%), 30-39 (33.9%), and 40-49 (50.3%). In addition, 58.6 % were identified as never been married, while 32.1% were identified as divorced. Most of the participants reported being a member of Christ Church for more than 5 years (36%); while 32.8% were identified as being a member for 1-5 years (Table 5.1).

Table 5.1. Online Ministry Survey Demographic: (N=215)

	N	(%)
Gender		
Male	37	17.4%
Female	176	82.6%
Not Identified	2	
Age		
25-29	30	15.9%
30-39	64	33.9%
40-49	95	50.3%

Table 5.1. Online Ministry Survey Demographic: (N=215) - Continued

	N	(%)
Not Identified	26	
Marital Status		
Never Married	126	58.6%
Divorced	69	32.1%
Widow/Widower	6	2.8%
Single Parent	14	6.5%
Length of Time Attending Christ Church		
Less than 6 months	20	9.8%
Less than 1 year	19	9.3%
1-5yrs	75	36.6%
5+ yrs	91	44.4%
Not Identified	10	
Length of Time as a Member of Christ Church		
Less than 6 months	43	22.8%
Less than 1 year	16	8.5%
1-5yrs	62	32.8%
5+ yrs	68	36.0%
Not Identified	26	

Qualitative Demographics

The qualitative research method consisted of 'in-depth interviews. A total of 10 friendship pairs (dyads); 6 females, and 4 males were selected for this study. Out of the 20 participants that participated in the personal interviews, 8 were male and 12 were female. Furthermore, 95% were identified as never been married, while 5% were identified as divorced. As it pertains to ethnicity, 14 participants were identified as African American, 1 as Asian Pacific Islander, 2 as Caucasian, and 3 as Hispanic. The age ranges were also reflective of the church population with, 11 participants between ages of 22-29, 7 participants between the ages of 30-39, and 2 between ages 40-45. Finally, 11 participants responded of their membership status of Christ Church for 4-10 years, while 6 have been a member for 1-3 years, and 3 have been a member for 10+ years (Table 5.2).

Table 5.2. Personal Interviews Demographic: (N=20)

	N	(%)
Gender		
Male	8	40.0%
Female	12	60.0%
Age		
22-29	11	55.0%
30-39	7	35.0%
40-45	2	10.0%
Marital Status		
Never Married	19	95.0%
Divorced	1	5.0%
Race/Ethnicity		
African-American/Black	14	70%
Asian-Pacific Islander	1	5%
Caucasian/White	2	10%
Hispanic	3	15%
Length of Time as a Member of Christ Church		
1-3yrs	6	30.0%
4-10yrs	11	55.0%
10+ yrs	3	15.0%

Data Analysis

RQ1: Descriptive Task

How are young adults making friends, and what determines the nature and quality of these relationships in a large congregation?

The first task in understanding friendship development among single adults in the megachurch was to engage in priestly listening. Priestly listening is, first and foremost, an activity of the entire Christian community, not just its leaders. It reflects the nature of the congregation as a fellowship in which people listen to one another as a form of mutual support, care and edification (Osmer 2008, 35). The descriptive-empirical task is a process of gathering information that helps to discern patterns and dynamics in particular episodes, situations, or contexts (Osmer 2008, 4).

The results of **RQ1** were mainly acquired through the personal interview questions 1 through 6. Data reduction process was used to code the interview questions based on data themes (Table 5.3). The results revealed two major categories related to spiritual friendships that are developed in a megachurch.

The first was the quality of spiritual friendships and the benefits gained on placing a value on them. The second was the significance and priority that is placed on spiritual friendships, verses non-spiritual friendships.

Table 5.3. Personal Interviews Qualitative Data Coding: (N=20)

Friendship Interview Question	Coding
Making Friends (MF):	
How did you become friends with the following individual?	MF1
What value do you place on developing friendships in the church?	MF2
Do you find it easier or harder to develop friendships at this church?	MF3
What are the main qualities you look for in friendships?	MF4
How are spiritual friends different from non-spiritual friends?	MF5
What level of importance do you attach to this friendship based on frequency of social interaction?	MF6
Social Penetration Stage (SPS):	
What friendship stage are you currently: (1) casual acquaintance; (2) close friendship; or (3) very close friendship?	SPS1
What are two main themes that you have disclosed with your friend that you wouldn't have disclosed during the earlier stages of your friendship?	SPS2
Self-disclosure (SD):	
What propels you to self-disclose more to your friend? Or, what characteristics did your friend have that made it easier to self-disclose more?	SD1
Do you feel compelled to reciprocate self-disclosure once your friend revealed himself to you?	SD2
What sort of topics would you be willing to disclose to your spiritual friend that you wouldn't disclose to a non-spiritual friend?	SD3
Cost and Rewards (CR):	
Are your friendships mutually rewarding? If so, how?	CR1
What two ideas can the church do in order to make friendships development easier?	CR2

Qualities in Spiritual Friendships

During the personal interviews; when asked how they became friends (MF1), 50% met while serving in ministry, 40% in a church social event, and 10% in a small group. When asked of the value they place in developing friendships (MF2); interestingly, most participants placed a high value on friendship development in the church (75%); while 20% placed a medium level of friendship development and 5% placed a low level of friendship development in the church (Table 5.4). In speaking to the levels of friendship, one of the interviewee responded:

I consider it a medium, because I had put full trust in people and I have been burned. A couple of people that I've met here, they have actually made this process a lot easier on me to the point where they're changing my mind, because before I was at a lowly stage. When I first came to this church, being that I had a past that really crushed me with people...I used to find myself sitting in the back and just getting what I wanted. It was just me and God for that moment. But, when I started becoming more involved in the church I started seeing people's heart... and how God was actually putting people in my life (Table 5.9.MF3-1912-1A).

The word "quality" represents a distinctive characteristic of a property or thing. When describing their close spiritual friendships, the interviewee were asked to describe the friendship's distinctive qualities and attributes (MF4). With such variabilities in friendship development, the top three qualities most participants identified were honesty 43%, genuineness 27% and availability 14% (Table 5.4).

The main qualities I look for is just an honest person, a person that's honest with themselves and honest with another person. I am not looking for, I guess, if you want to say like some super deep spiritual experience, just the person that is kind of honest, free flowing...a person that is honest, a person that is just respectful, and a person that is willing, that is not, you know, that is not always just one way. (Table 5.9. MF4-1712-1A)

Table 5.4. Friendship Interview Results: Making Friends (MF)

Questions 1 - 6	N	(%)
MF1 (N=10)		
Serving in Ministry	5	50.0%
Church Event	4	40.0%
Small Group	1	10.0%
MF2 (N=20)		
High	16	80.0%
Medium	4	20.0%
Low	0	0.0%
MF3 (N=20)		
Hard	13	65.0%
Easy	7	35.0%
MF4 (N=37)		
Honesty	16	43.0%
Genuineness	11	30.0%
Available	5	14.0%
Other	5	14.0%
MF5 (N=32)		
Christian Faith/Values	13	41.0%
Christian Perspective on Advice	10	31.0%
Other	9	28.0%
MF6 (N=20)		
High	13	65.0%
Medium	6	30.0%
Low	1	5.0%

When speaking to spiritual friends, the word “honest” has personal meaning such as; trust, truthfulness, or integrity. Interestingly, these words are associated with exhibiting Christ-like behaviors. The second quality was “available” from an emotional and/or physical standpoint. Spiritual friends believe that their Christian walk can at times be so challenging that it requires a spiritual friendship that is available at all times. The reason for this availability varies; however, the common reasons stems from someone who can provide instant spiritual advice, prayer, and emotional comfort. Physical availability was necessary, but not as necessary as emotional availability. The third common answer was “genuineness.”

Genuineness is referred to as someone who is not “super spiritual” to a point of not being “real.” While Christian principles and beliefs are a priority to spiritual friendships; when it involves deep interpersonal relationships, they want someone who at times can put aside the “Christian jargon” and discuss struggles and issues in an open non-judgmental format.

Significance of Spiritual Friendships

The second was the significance and priority that is placed on spiritual friendships verses non-spiritual friendships. When asked whether it was easy or hard to develop friendships at the subject’s megachurch (MF3), 65% of participants stated that it was hard to form/develop friendships in the church and 35% found it easy to form or develop friendships in the church (Table 5.4). When probed further, the subjects stated that the caveat for ease in friendship development was based upon the willingness of each party to actively engage in a church activity. Subsequently, the inability to develop friendships increases and becomes more challenging, due to the lack of involvement of individuals in small groups and church led activities

When asked how spiritual friends were different from non-spiritual friends (MF5), the responses varied according to each friendship pairs. However, 41% of the responses were geared towards shared Christian faith and values, and 31% were specific toward wanting a Christian perspective on advice (Table 5.4). The decision of whether to reach out to a spiritual or non-spiritual friend was determined solely upon the severity of the personal challenge, topic, or issue. Furthermore, the participants reserved the right to limit major personal challenges, spiritual issues, and deep internal fears to those considered close spiritual friends. In speaking to the levels of spiritual friendships, one interviewee responded:

They are different. I would say for me it's easier for me to reach out to my spiritual friends to just have those accountability partners and time of fellowship—just getting to the atmosphere of GOD and just basking in his presence. It's easier to do that with them [spiritual friends], where you feel like your burdens is being lifted. I think with a spiritual friend, it's like, iron sharpens iron... (Table 5.9. MF5-1912-2B)

Minor issues surrounding the preference of clothes, foods and music were reserved for non-spiritual friends. Interestingly, 65% of participants placed high level of friendship importance to frequency of social interaction (MF6), 30% placed medium level of importance on frequency of social interactions, and 5% placed low frequency of friendship importance based on social interaction (Table 5.4).

Findings and Conclusions

RQ2: Interpretive Task

What theories and models can provide insight and understanding in interpreting these dynamics?

The second task in understanding friendship development among single adults in the megachurch was to interpret and gain “sagely wisdom.” One method in gaining wisdom is through theoretical interpretation. The interpretive task is the drawing on theories of the arts and sciences to better understand and explain why these patterns and dynamics are occurring (Osmer 2008, 83).

The results of **RQ2** were mainly acquired through the personal interview questions 7 through 13. Utilizing the Social Penetration Theory as a backdrop for understanding friendship development, the answers revealed distinct characteristics and similarities to the theory. The researcher was able to extract three major themes from this section of the interviews: (1) stages of social penetration theory; (2) self-disclosure in spiritual friendships; and (3) cost and rewards of spiritual friendships.

Stages of Social Penetration Theory

Social penetration processes proceed in a gradual and orderly fashion from superficial to intimate levels of exchange. The four stages of interpersonal development are: (1) orientation; (2) exploratory affective exchange; (3) affective exchange; and (4) stable exchange. When asked what friendship stage they considered their friendship to be in currently (SPS1), 60% of the participants were identified as being very close friends, while 30% identified as being close friends, and 10% identified as casual acquaintances (Table 5.5). In two cases, friendship perceptions were conflicting as one viewed their friendship as a casual friendship; whilst their friend believed it to be a close friendship. While it seemed to be an awkward moment, neither person changed their response after hearing the sentiments of the other friendship pair.

The researcher assigned the SPT development stage based upon the perceived friendship stage expressed by each interviewee. The friendships correlated with the defined developmental stages of the social penetration theory (Altman and Taylor 1973, 135–141). According to the theory on interpersonal development 60% of the participants fell into the Stage Exchange, while 20% fell into the Exploratory Affective Exchange, and 20% fell into the Affective Exchange.

The assigned social penetration developmental stage was based upon the two main themes that each interviewee described as willing to disclose to their spiritual friend now that they would not have disclosed in the earlier stages of their friendship (SPS2), 37% have discussed matters of sexual interest and dating, 20% religious convictions, 20% goals/aspirations, 9% fears/fantasies, and 9% concept about self (Table 5.5).

Table 5.5. Friendship Interview Results: Social Penetration Stage (SPS)

Questions 7 - 8	N	(%)
SPS1 (N=20)		
Casual Acquaintance	2	10.0%
Close Friendship	6	30.0%
Very Close Friendship	12	60.0%
SPS2 (N=35)		
Sexual Interests/Dating	13	37.0%
Religious Conviction	7	20.0%
Goals and Aspirations	7	20.0%
Fears and Fantasies	3	9.0%
Concept of Self	3	9.0%
Other	2	5.0%

Self-disclosure in Spiritual Friendships

The results of questions 9 through 11 of the friendship interviews revealed aspects of self-disclosure surrounding spiritual friendships. When asked as to what propelled self-disclosure and what characteristics of their friendships make for easy self-disclosure (SD1), 45% indicated their openness, 35% as genuine and 20% non-judgmental (Table 5.6). In speaking to the levels of self-disclosure, one interviewee responded:

She is very non judgmental...and she is very real! It is not hard for me to just kind of -- just blatantly tell her what I feel or what I'm thinking, because there is a sincerity in her heart that, you know, somebody else, you kind of see their face kind of twist up. And you don't really see that with her. (Table 5.9. SD1-2112-1B)

From the context of friendship characteristics, the term “openness” means to “open one’s heart” in an effort to disclose or uncover oneself and vulnerability. The interviewee’s discussed the need for a friend to be available to both open their heart to disclose freely, as well as to be ready to open their heart to receive self-disclosure. It was not enough for friendship communication to be one sided. Another main characteristic that make it easier to self-disclose was the other person to be “non-judgmental.” The study responses indicated that as both parties are on a spiritual journey, they wanted to be with someone who will

understand and encourage the other; rather than judge them based upon their actions, feelings, or misinterpretation of Scripture.

The participants were also asked if one felt compelled to self disclose after the other self disclosed certain aspects of himself or herself (SD2), 35% indicated that they felt a need to self-disclose something about them once the other friendship pair had self disclosed (Table 5.6).

Table 5.6. Friendship Interview Results: Self-disclosure (SD)

Questions 9 - 11	N	(%)
SD1 (N=20)		
Openness	9	45.0%
Genuine	7	35.0%
Non-judgmental	4	20.0%
SD2 (N=20)		
No	13	65.0%
Yes	7	35.0%
SD3 (N=34)		
Spiritual Matters	11	38.0%
Sexual Interest/Relationships	10	33.0%
Personal Family Matters	4	12.0%
Career	3	9.0%
Emotions	2	6.0%
Other	4	12.0%

For these, it was a matter of feeling that the other person's heart was open to give and receive self-disclosure. The remaining 65% indicated that self-disclosure to the other person was not a matter of being compelled. Rather, it came naturally to self disclose about themselves, due to the openness, genuineness, and stage of the friendship. For some, they regarded it an honor that the other person was willing to trust them with such personal matters regarding themselves.

Lastly, the question was posed to each friendship pair as to what sort of topics they were willing to disclose to spiritual friends that they would not disclose to non-spiritual

friends (SD3). The top two responses were 38% spiritual matters and 33% sexual interests/relationships (Table 5.6). An example of a interviewee's response:

Good question. So for me, I would probably ask them to pray for me; you know, like—loneliness and those things, you know—because they'll know to hold me up in prayer and to keep me. So yeah, I would think the things that I struggle with in my walk, you know, because I don't want the non spiritual friends to see that weakness. I'm trying to live a life, you know, of righteousness, before them. You know, I kind of don't want them to be exposed to certain things, you know? Like struggles that you share. Until I overcome them, I guess, you know? So yeah, the other one major topic is, like, failures, too, you know? Things that you failed at and stuff. Because as a child of Christ, you know, the Word says that we should be the head and not the tail. So we're really supposed to be setting an example. So when I fall short of that in some way, like, I don't usually want to discuss it with people, you know, that don't believe. Because I'm the one who's always like, you know, hey, God is amazing, he's wonderful, he helps me through -- you know? (Table 5.9.SD3-2112-1A)

The interviewees expressed that aside from attempting to evangelize to their non-spiritual friends, there was no advantage or benefit in discussing personal, spiritual matters with them; as their concept of spiritual matters were skewed. The other major topic was in the area of relationships and sexuality. As the interviewees, were all single adults, they preferred that any matter relating to their sexuality and intimate relationships be considered top personal concerns. Moreover, as of such, the interviewees reserved this important personal topic to be discussed with close spiritual friends; with whom they felt would provide the most spiritual guidance and advice from a biblical standpoint. Additionally, they reserved that self-disclosure topics in this delicate area be reserved for discussions with close friendships that were in the 'stable exchange' stage of the social penetration theory. It is apparent that friends are willing to disclose a greater breadth of topics to spiritual friends than to non-spiritual friends and also feel they are stronger confidantes. This is a phenomenon that is sought after even among non-spiritual friends.

Matthew Brashears, assistant professor of sociology at Cornell University surveyed more than 2,000 adults ages 18 and older from the nationally representative Time-sharing Experiments for the Social Sciences (TESS) program. The internet surveys were conducted between April 23 and May 2010. Participants were asked to list the names of people they had discussed “important matters” with over the previous six months. About 48 percent of participants listed one name, 18 percent listed two, and roughly 29 percent listed more than two names for these close friends. The study revealed that on average, participants had 2.03 confidantes compared to 2.08 in 2004, and 2.94 in 1985 (Bryner 2011). While this study does not indicate if the participants were spiritual or non-spiritual friends; nevertheless, it is clear that the issue of “breadth of self-disclosure” has in part attributed to a decrease in close friends over the course of two decades.

Cost and Rewards of Spiritual Friendships

The results of questions 12 and 13 of the friendship interview revealed aspects of cost and rewards of spiritual friendships. Interpersonal rewards and costs are motivational in that rewards form the basis for maintaining or continuing a relationship to deeper levels of exchange, whereas costs lead to a winding down or dissolution of relationships. In an attempt to derive an answer, the researcher asked if they believed that their friendship was mutually rewarding; if so, how much and in what way? Interestingly, 100% believed that their friendship was rewarding. However, there were no costs associated with their friendship, which means that their friendship continues to grow into deeper levels of self-disclosure and personal benefit. The greater the ratio of rewards to costs, the more rapid the penetration process. Nevertheless, since the researcher is studying the interpersonal relationships among Christian single adults, the rewards for each person generally fell within

a Christian context. When asked to describe how the friendship is rewarding (CR1), 50% attribute to a “shared Christian walk.” 21% benefit from sharing knowledge and experience, 18% enjoy spending time on a social basis, and 7% need an accountability partner (Table 5.7).

Table 5.7. Friendship Interview Results: Cost and Rewards (CR1)

Question 12	N	(%)
CR1 (N=28)		
Share Christian Walk	14	50.0%
Share Knowledge & Experience	6	21.0%
Social Partner	5	18.0%
Accountability Partner	2	7.0%
Other	1	4.0%

An overwhelming response was geared to “shared Christian walk” when expressing the rewards of being in close friendship with the other person. The benefits were the opportunity to share Christian experiences, trials, personal hurts and fears, goals and aspirations. Each person was uniquely aware that they could not undergo their Christian journey alone. Each person was expressive in communicating the joy and benefit of being able to walk the Christian walk with the other person. They expressed that their intimacy with God and spiritual growth was in part due to their friendship with the other person. While these friendships originated at the church, most came to know Jesus as their Lord and Savior at about the same time in their life. Thus, enabling them to relate to each other based upon similarly, shared Christian experiences.

Another reward in their friendship stemmed from the ability to have a “shared knowledge” whereas, one person in the friendship gained the benefit of gleaning from the experience and knowledge of the other. The experience was either spiritual or secular, and the knowledge was either biblical or natural wisdom. The receivers of this reward expressed

how they were able to grow spiritually, in their careers and in trials because of the timely advice given to them by their friend.

RQ3: Normative Task

In light of biblical and theological truth, what should be the type of friendships young singles should have in the church?

The third task in understanding friendship development among single adults in the megachurch is to utilize a sense of theological reflection as to what ought to be happening in the church setting. Theological interpretation focuses on the interpretation of present episodes, situations, and contexts with theological concepts (Osmer 2008, 139). The theological interpretation is the most formal dimension of the normative task.

The author acquired the results of **RQ3** through two means; first, through the observation of present episodes, situations and context of friendship development among single adults of the subject megachurch. And second, through the analysis of the conducted friendship interviews, providing common themes in light of theological concepts that allowed the researcher to arrive at specific biblical practices of spiritual friendships.

Biblical Best Practices for Spiritual Friendships

Close interpersonal relationships that are initiated and developed in the church have a common thread that is characteristic and considered true spiritual friendships. The basic foundational aspect that distinguishes spiritual friendships from other relationships is that they are centered in Christ, they seek Christ, and they strive according to Christ (Laker 1977, SF 1:6; Wadell 2002, 107–108). The researcher highlighted these best practices in light of the theological research in conjunction with the observations, personal interviews, and survey results conducted for this study.

Spiritual Friendships: Centered in Christ

Spiritual friends have a common spiritual belief system that binds them together (McKeon 1947, *Nic. Eth.* 9.8.2). They understand the significance and correlation between being in Christ Jesus and the benefits earned in their friendship (Fitzgerald 2007, 292). The Apostle Paul noted that being anchored in Christ causes them to be like-minded and one in spirit (Philippians 2:2).

The principle good in their friendships is a mutual love for Christ and a desire to grow together in Christ. The responses of the personal interviews revealed that 41% believe that the main benefit in their friendship being centered in Christ is that they hold like values and customs in common (Table 5.4). It is having the same priorities, having a unified purpose, and embracing a common way of seeing the world (Bockmuehl 1998, 109). They are convinced that what they want more than anything is to deepen their relationship with God. Through their centeredness in Christ they help each other challenge the sins that they have come to love (Jones 2006, 31).

Spiritual Friendships: Seek Christ Together

The primary characteristic of seeking Christ together stems from the willingness of both parties to self disclosure. During the personal interviews when asked as to what propelled self-disclosure and what characteristics of their friendships make for easy self-disclosure (SD1), 45% indicated their openness. In close spiritual friendships; whereby a priority is placed in seeking Christ together, self disclosure causes friends to be honest and vulnerable with each other. Spiritual friendships, which have a root in Christ, are understood to have an ongoing life in Christ, and are perfected in Christ as the friends create opportunities to involve Christ in their shared activities and their daily spiritual lives. During

the personal interviews; when asked to describe how their spiritual friendship is rewarding (CR1), 50% attribute it to a “shared Christian walk” (Table 5.7). They are committed to growing in Christ and in helping to disciple each other; encouraging each other to acquire and develop the attitudes and virtues of Christ, by helping each other become better friends of God.

Therefore, during the personal interviews, when asked by the author what sort of topics they were willing to disclose to their spiritual friend rather than their non-spiritual friend, the result was overwhelmingly “spiritual matters” (Table 5.6). In digging deeper; they expressed spiritual matters in terms of sharing times of intimacy with God, sharing and practicing spiritual disciplines, and reflecting upon the progress of their spiritual journey. In the same manner that Jesus had no secrets from His disciples, He also desires for spiritual friends to not have any secrets from each other. Aelred of Rivaulx also indicated that a true friend is one who is a confidante (Laker 1997, SF 3:83).

Spiritual friend’s help one another deepen their Christ-like love and overcome barriers to holiness in their lives. The purpose of their friendships is not for selfish gains, but rather, to help one another become a better individual, and thus become a Godly witness within the body of Christ. Consequently, each must allow the other to provide counsel, guidance, correction, and even challenge them to develop their faith further, as they grow in Christ.

Spiritual Friendships: Live According to Christ

Spiritual friendships strive to live out biblical principles through a unique spiritual relationship. As friends, their lives involve the combined efforts of shared experiences; as friends who know that whatever they do, they are doing it together in Christ. They know

Christ accompanies them wherever they go; regardless of whatever material possession they may own, and that Christ is in their midst no matter what they might be doing (Hebrews 13:5). As they spend time together in going to the movies, shopping or touring a museum, going to lunch or dinner, or simply by exercising together, they are not only learning about a spiritual life, but they are actually living it in their daily walk. When asked to describe how their spiritual friendship is rewarding (CR1), 18% enjoy spending time on a social basis, and 7% need an accountability partner (Table 5.7).

They live according to Christ by the simple things they do to show that they care, in offering advice, and in not being afraid to be the voice of reason. They live according to Christ when they make one another laugh and when they help build hope for the cares that sometimes overwhelms the clarity of God's promises. Through it, they learn more about God and His goodness, as they encourage the special bond shared by each individual who have committed to the spiritual friendship.

RQ4: Pragmatic Task

How can the church better promote and sustain true spiritual friendships?

The fourth and final task answers the question; how might we respond to the issues of friendship development in ways that are faithful and effective? The research and study of friendship development in a megachurch must end with the type of "strategies of action" that will influence the situation and create change. The pragmatic approach involves the congregational leader who can see things "whole" and who can think in terms of the entire congregational system and the church's relationship to its context (Osmer 2008, 10).

The conclusions of **RQ4** were acquired through the knowledge gained during the research project; i.e., literature review, theological framework, personal interviews, online ministry survey, data analysis, and observation of present episodes, situations and context of

friendship development among single adults of the subject megachurch. A major component to the research was the use of the Single's Ministry Survey to gather additional data. Data reduction process was used to code the online survey based on data themes (Table 5.8). This research project has led to five specific ministerial applications that the congregational leader can utilize in order to more effectively create the type of relational atmosphere that will foster greater opportunities for friendship development in a megachurch. These ministerial applications can be developed as part of an overall strategic plan for church interpersonal relationships.

Ministerial Application 1: Prioritize Friendship Development

In the online ministry survey, when asked to respond as to the reason why they believe it is challenging to develop friendships at the subject megachurch (FD23), 41% indicated that they personally did not make friendship development a priority (Figure 5.1). During the personal interviews, when asked to give two ideas on how the church can foster friendship development (CR2), 12% of the responses were geared towards the church making friendship development a priority (Figure 5.2). The megachurch is commended for its large scale programs, dynamic preaching, and uplifting worship; but, aside from the small group ministry the subject of friendship development does not take front and center stage in every aspect of the ministry (i.e., children and youth, outreach, preaching topics, etc.). Developing spiritual friendships is a two-way street – church and congregant – both parties must be willing participants in making friendships a priority. Unfortunately, due to the “busy” culture of the church, congregants are caught in a hectic rush of scheduled activities and programs; often finding themselves too frantic to make space for the extended leisurely times required to build deep friendships. Relationships take time and energy; but most of all it

takes willingness. In forging spiritual friendships, the congregational leaders must be able to lead the task of balancing church priorities with congregational lifestyles that will foster strong spiritual friendships.

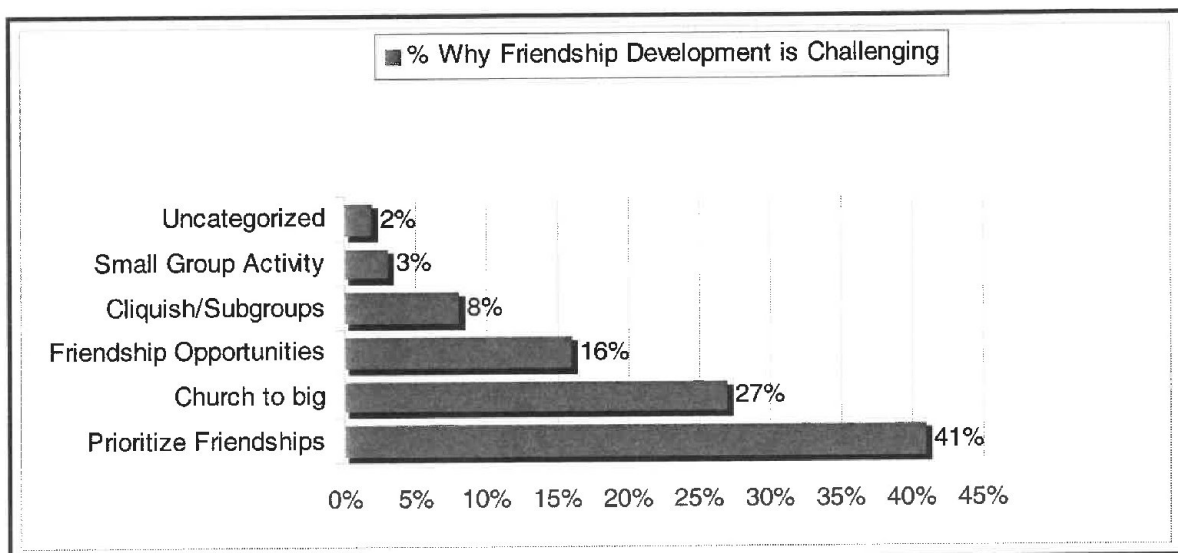


Figure 5.1. Reasons why friendship development at Christ Church (Megachurch) is challenging. (N=93)

Ministerial Application 2: Create Opportunities for Friendships

In the online ministry survey, when asked to respond as to the reason why they believe it is challenging to develop friendships at the subject megachurch (FD23), 16% indicated that there are not enough friendship opportunities (i.e., social events, outings, etc.) available at the subject megachurch (Figure 5.1). During the personal interviews, when asked to give two ideas on how this church can foster friendship development (CR2), 36% of the responses were geared towards the necessity for there to be more opportunities for friendship development (Figure 5.2).

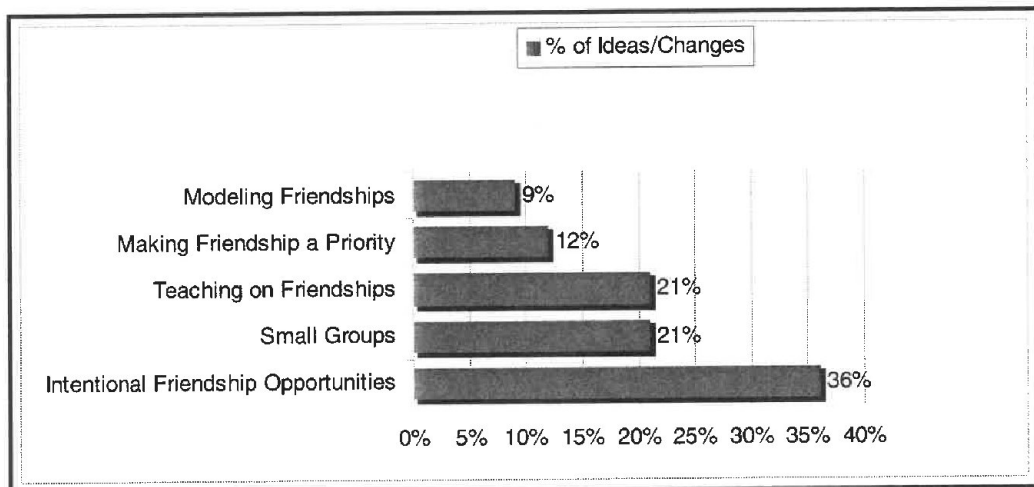


Figure 5.2. Suggested Ideas/Changes on Making friendship development easier (N=33)

When probed deeper into this question, it was noted that the church has a low to medium quantity of social events; however, the issue stems from not having a varied, consistent and tailored social program geared specifically for friendship development. For instance, the megachurch may offer an occasional financial seminar, which may include refreshments served during the seminar. For most, the presumption is that this seminar entails a “social component” because food is available and participants can easily meet someone new if they choose. However, this is not considered to be varied, consistent and specifically tailored to friendship development.

Traditionally, the Church was known for its monthly potluck lunches, coffee, and pastries at the end of the worship service in the community hall, and the pastor shaking hands to everyone who exits the building. These functions were geared specifically to make the worship experience personable and inviting. It fostered friendship development because it connected people to one another. Nonetheless, this format is a thing of the past for churches with thousands of people attending weekend services. The congregational leader is tasked with developing a social program that is consistent, tailored and fits every demographic (i.e.,

children, youth, women, men, seniors, etc.). In much the same way as the traditional church, these social events must not have an attached teaching component, agenda or sales pitch for another event—rather for the expressed purpose of having face to face time in order to foster friendships.

Ministerial Application 3: Reduce Megachurch to Small Church Perspective

The term “megachurch” generally refers to any Protestant congregation with a sustained average weekly attendance of 2,000 persons or more in its worship services. The selected New Jersey megachurch used for this study conducts seven weekend worship services, spanned over two campuses, in two separate townships. The average weekend attendance is 2,300 individuals. As such, the congregants speak of each of the seven worship services as being a separate church due to its size, demographic makeup, style and church culture.

The respondents to the online survey; when asked to indicate the reasons why friendship development was challenging (CR2), 27% indicated that the church is too big (Figure 5.1). Yet, when asked if they currently attend a singles small group (SM10) and overwhelming 92% of respondents indicating “no” and 81% stated that they would be interested in attending one. When asked to select two things they would like to see happen in that small group, if they attended (SM13), 70% indicated that they would like to talk about relationships and dating, and 66% said they wanted to discuss how to integrate singleness with their Christian faith. As it pertains to a small groups focus, results reflected studying the Bible at 59% and praying for one another at 46%. Interestingly, of the four areas, spiritual disciplines were ranked as the two lowest things they would want to engage in. (Figure 5.3).

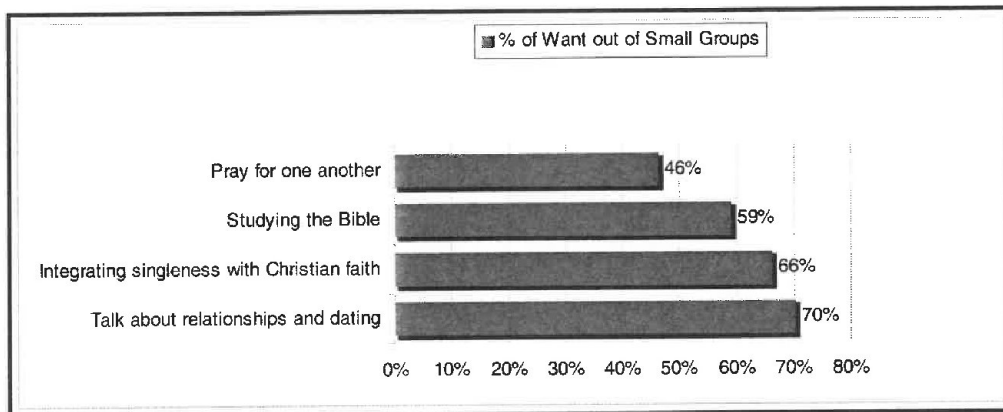


Figure 5.3. What single adults would like to see happen at small groups? (N=181)

Single adults understand clearly the correlation between small groups and friendship development; with 49% of online survey respondents willing to meet every other week for two hours (SM14) and 62% willing to meet on a Friday or Saturday night. It is clear that the congregational leader must be able to take a megachurch with its complex organizational structure, multiple programs and abundant choices and condense it into a small church perspective—hence through small groups.

Ministerial Application 4: Model Friendships in the Church

During the personal interviews, when asked to give two ideas on how this church can foster friendship development (CR2), 9% of the responses were geared towards the church doing a better job at modeling friendships. To “model” in this sense is to provide a standard or example for imitation or comparison.

Every church has a distinctive ministerial focus; i.e., financial empowerment, worship and creative arts, domestic and international missions, community development, etc. which drive the organizational structure and philosophy of ministry. In fact, the community is aware of this ministerial focus and will call upon it when necessary. In particular, two of the most inherent ministerial focuses of the subject megachurch is family and marriage, as well as leadership development. However, when friendship development or interpersonal

relationship building is discussed, this megachurch does not stand out as an organization that champion that cause. Scripture highlights an important phrase; “what the priests do, the people do” (Hosea 4:9 NLT).

A 2005 nationwide telephone survey was conducted by The Barna Group among a sample of 627 Senior Pastors of Protestant Churches. It revealed that pastors brim with self-confidence in many areas of ministry, but admit it is a challenge to maintain genuine connections with other people. Being a spiritual leader of other people creates unusual relational dynamics and expectations. The study shows seven intriguing insights about how pastors think of themselves and the churches they lead. One of those areas is often a lost sense of connection with others: a majority of pastors (61%) admit that they “have few close friends” (Barna 2006).

In conjunction with the senior leadership the congregational leader must develop concrete skills and steps that aid the senior leadership in modeling friendships. Some ideas may include: (1) relaxed and inviting attire; (2) warm facial expressions; (3) staying after services to greet congregants and connecting personally with their name; (4) introduce their personal friends to the congregation; (5) establishing social media presence (i.e., Facebook and Twitter) and intentionally building relationships; and (6) self-disclosing their personal hobbies and interests.

Ministerial Application 5: Intentional Teaching on Friendship Development

During the personal interviews, when asked to give two ideas on how the church can foster friendship development (CR2), 21% of the responses were geared towards teaching on friendship development (Figure 5.1). In the online ministry survey, when asked; what topics they would like to see taught at events and small group meetings (TOI6); the top three topics

from respondents were, 59% marriage readiness, 55% dating techniques, and 50% developing friendships (Figure 5.4).

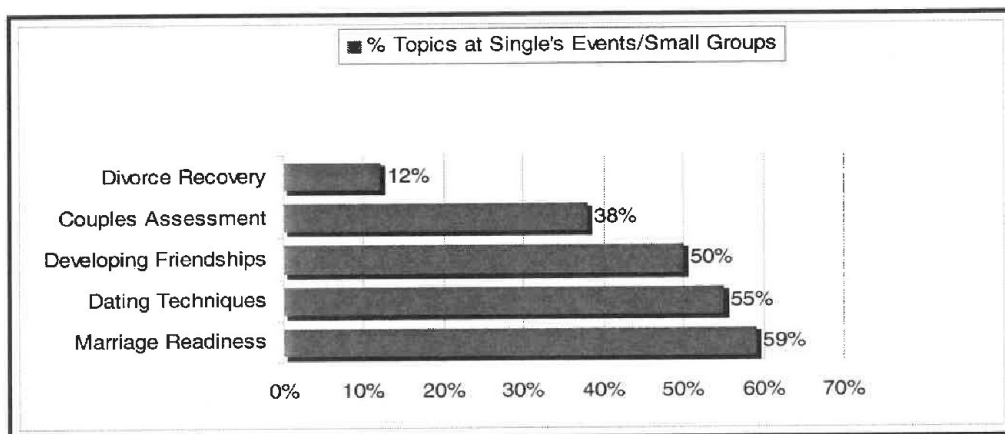


Figure 5.4. Topics single adults want to see most addressed at events/small groups. (N=406)

The results revealed more than just the type of topics the single adults would like to learn; it also revealed the admission that interpersonal techniques and skills are critical. The three major topics; marriage readiness, dating techniques and friendship development all share similar course material (i.e., being friendly, grooming, attire, personality, personal growth, etc.) that can be used in developing these teaching opportunities. The congregational leader must provide consistent, workshops, seminars and structured courses specifically geared for interpersonal relationships.

Table 5.8. Online Ministry Survey Quantitative Data Coding: (N=215)

Christ Church Single's Ministry Survey 2012	Coding
Background Information (BI):	
Gender	BI1
Age	BI2
Marital Status	BI3
How long have you been attending Christ Church?	BI4
How long have you been a member of Christ Church?	BI5
Topics of Interest (TOI):	
Which of the following topics would you like to see addressed at the Single's Ministry events and small group meetings?	TOI6
Retreats (RT):	
Would you be interested in attending Single's retreats?	RT7
If so, what type of retreat would interest you most?	RT8
What length of retreat would you prefer?	RT9
Small Groups (SG):	
Are you currently attending a Single's small group?	SM10
If no, would you be interested in attending one?	SM11
Are you interested in being trained as a small group leader?	SM12
What would you like to see happen in that group?	SM13
How often would you prefer to meet in small groups?	SM14
When would you prefer to meet in small groups?	SM15
Would you be willing to assist on an event/strategy committee?	SM16
If yes, what are your areas of potential interest?	SM17
Friendship Development (FD):	
What would you personally like to accomplish through your involvement in the Single's Ministry?	FD18
Have you initiated friendships at this church?	FD19
If yes, how many are considered close friends?	FD20
What level of importance do you place on developing friendships in the church?	FD21
Do you find it easy or challenging to develop friendships at this church?	FD22
If challenging, why?	FD23
Contact Information (CI):	
I would like someone to contact me so that I can become more involved.	CI24
My contact information is:	CI25

Table 5.9. Friendship Dyads: Gender and Provided Alias Number

Gender	Friendship - A	Friendship - B
Male	1712-1A	1712-1B
Female	1912-1A	1912-1B
Female	1912-2A	1912-2B
Female	2112-1A	2112-1B
Male	2112-2A	2112-2B
Female	2212-1A	2212-1B
Male	2212-2A	2212-2B
Female	2212-3A	2212-3B
Female	2212-4A	2212-4B
Male	2312-1A	2312-1B

Recommendations for Further Study

After conducting an extensive literature review, an interview process involving 20 single adults, and gathering data from online survey respondents of more than 215 single adults, the researcher within the remaining passage of the report now makes five recommendations regarding gaining more knowledge and understanding about friendship development within a church setting.

First Recommendation: Friendship Development Curriculum

First, as the subject of friendship development skills were addressed in almost every discussion, individuals noted that it was a huge struggle to engage in making friends; mainly because they did not have the necessary interpersonal skills enabling them to do so effortlessly. Therefore, the researcher recommends that further study be conducted on how to train congregational leaders and congregations alike in developing and implementing effective curriculum on interpersonal skills training, geared to the church experience.

Second Recommendation: Congregational Friendship Health Measurement

Second, the author recommends that church leaders design and implement an instrument to help congregational leaders assess their level of “church friendship health.” In

so doing, it will provide a general idea of areas in which the congregational leader can provide improvement; i.e., church friendliness, how effective are specific social events, number of initiated friendships, and quality of ongoing friendships. This will aid in galvanizing the church toward each other and ultimately toward God.

Third Recommendation: Friendship Perceptions Study

The third recommendation is an attempt of churches to understand the perceptions that individuals have of friendships. A proposed study, asking individuals to recount past experiences within friendships, could also provide potentially useful information. For example, researchers could ask individuals to recount an experience in which they were able to support a spiritual friend verses a non-spiritual friend in a difficult time; as well as an experience in which they felt that they let a friend down. Thereafter, the leaders must analyze the responses to determine if specific themes emerge; ultimately, using the results to implement change within the culture of the organization.

Fourth Recommendation: Qualitative Study on Terminated Friendships

Fourth, suggests the need to conduct a qualitative study related to friendships that have been terminated by individuals and compare it with friendships that have been maintained over long periods. Determining the reasons why such friendships disintegrate or continue could; also provide valuable information to the congregational leader related to interpersonal relationship maintenance.

Fifth Recommendation: Gender Self-disclosure Study

Fifth, based on the findings from this study, that females are more likely to embrace friendships and have a higher comfort level of self-disclosure within their friendships than their male counterparts. Further research into the way females and males communicate in

interpersonal relationships could prove beneficial. This will aid the congregational leader in developing gender specific programs and activities based upon how genders develop friendships. It will help answer the pointed question, are gender specific ministries (i.e., men's prayer groups, women retreats, etc.) effective in promoting friendships in the church?

Conclusion

The key role of spiritual friendships in the lives of individuals should not be underestimated; thus, understanding the way they are initiated and developed is relevant in having a strong and healthy relational church. Altman and Taylor's social penetration theory provides a sociological interpersonal framework on which to build; however, the spiritual component to friendships development is credible.

Nonetheless, what does this mean for the church, the community of the friends of God? Spiritual friendships challenge our churches to become communities where people help one another overcome barriers; ultimately leading them to holiness as they continually grow in Christ-like manner and love. Many churches experience safe and superficial relationships, where people become experts at flattery because they are afraid of the truth. Churches should be places where our common life in Christ enables us to speak the truth to one another, counsel, challenge, and even correct one another. However, in so many churches we gather as strangers, worship as strangers, and leave as strangers. It happens because we love our isolation and do not want anyone, even a sister or brother in Christ, to know us well enough to speak the unflattering word. We want no one trespassing on our hearts, but the church ought to be the place where we welcome such trespassers whenever their intrusions can awaken us from our slumbers and draw us closer to God. We can worship so fervently;

yet blindly to a point of becoming a community where nobody is shocked when the faults and failures of everyone become glaringly transparent.

This study concluded that the social penetration theory coincides with the patterns of friendship development in the church setting. Indeed, the social penetration process is an orderly process that proceeds and developed through stages over time. Specifically, the interpersonal exchanges of the spiritual friendship pairs that participated in this study gradually progress from superficial, non-intimate areas to more intimate, deeper layers of selves. This unique process was observed as being easy, willing and genuine; mainly because of the sharing of like faith. While spiritual friendships still underwent similar interpersonal challenges, the rewards of self-disclosure outweighed the costs of being transparent and vulnerable. The data suggests that levels of self-disclosure in spiritual friendships superseded those of non-spiritual friends. Therefore, it is extremely important for the congregational leader to take on the challenge of fostering a thriving environment, in which friendship creation is a priority, and not taken for granted that friendship occurs simply because it's a friendly church.

APPENDIX A: GCTS—IRB Informed Consent

Participant Number: _____

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Project Title: Friendship Development among Single Adults in a Megachurch
Principal Investigator: Marcus Bourbon – Doctor of Ministry Degree Program

PURPOSE

This is a research study. The purpose of this study is to illuminate a societal concern regarding the formation and sustainability of friendships in the Megachurch congregation. An understanding of how friendships develop, mature, and decline will enhance the congregational leader in their ability to lead or communicate more effectively about the relational atmosphere of the church, its activities, and functions.

The purpose of this consent form is to give you the information you will need to help you decide whether to be in the study or not. You may ask any questions about the research, what you will be asked to do, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer, and anything else about the research or this form that is not clear.

We are inviting you to participate in this research study because you have been identified as someone who has initiated and/or have developed a close friendship while attending the selected Megachurch subject (Christ Church). You also meet the selected inclusion criteria as follows:

1. Church membership
2. 18 to 45 year olds
3. Single adults: never married, divorced, or widowed
4. Able to provide written consent
5. Able to speak and read English fluently

PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate, your involvement will last for approximately 60 minutes. You and your close friend will be asked to be personally interviewed together. During the interview, both of you will be asked the same series of open ended questions (13 questions). The questions will be geared to address two research questions: (1) *how are young adults making friends and what determines the nature and quality of these relationships in a large congregation?* and (2) *how can the church better promote and sustain true spiritual friendships?*

You will not be asked to take a written questionnaire.

RISKS

There are no foreseeable risks to participating in this study.

BENEFITS

There are no personal benefits for participating in this study. However, the researcher anticipates that, in the future, society and in particular, large congregations may benefit from the results of this study in understanding how friendships develop, mature, and decline. The congregational leader will be able lead more effectively in the area of relational development.

COMPENSATION

You will not be compensated for participating in this research project.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Records of participation in this research project will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. In order to ensure that there are no breaches in confidentiality, the personal interviews will be conducted solely by the primary researcher. For the purpose of this study, you will be given an alias name/numbers (i.e., interviewee A or B). The answers that are provided will never be linked with your real name. The interview will be audio recorded and the interviewer will take notes. All interview recordings and data will be maintained on an encrypted USB drive and locked in a personal file cabinet. The audio recordings will be transcribed by an outside private transcription, unaffiliated with the church. The researcher will secure all audio recordings, transcription documents, and personal interview notes in a safe and confidential place. Results of the interview will never be shared in whole or in part to others or with any leader of the church. In the event of any report or publication from this study, the researcher will not disclose the identity of the participants.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Taking part in this research study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you agree to participate in this study, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to take part, or if you stop participating at any time, your decision will not result in any penalty or loss to which you may otherwise be entitled. Any data from the interview prior to withdrawal will be destroyed and not used in the final study results.

QUESTIONS

Questions are encouraged. If you have any questions about this research project, please contact: Reverend, Marcus Bourbon, at 973-783-1010 or via e-mail at: mbourbon@christchurchusa.org. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, please contact the Chair of the Institutional Review Board, Dr. Maria Boccia at: mboccia@gordonconwell.edu

Your signature indicates that this research study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in this study. You will receive a copy of this form.

Participant's Name (printed):

(Signature of Participant)

(Date)

RESEARCHER STATEMENT

I have discussed the above points with the participant. It is my opinion that the participant understands the risks, benefits, and procedures involved with participation in this research study.

(Signature of Researcher)

(Date)

APPENDIX B: Friendship Interview

Participant Number: _____

Friendship Interview

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this voluntary research study. Please note you are under no obligation to continue with the interview process if you are uncomfortable with the questions being asked during the interview process. You can stop at anytime and all information collected will not be used as part of the data. All audio recordings, transcription documents, and personal interview notes will be placed in a secure and confidential place. All individuals whom do not wish to continue participating in the interview process; all the data will be destroyed in a secure manner. Results of the interview will never be shared in whole or in part to others or with any leader of the church.

Socio-Demographic Information:

Gender:

M _____

F _____

Single Status (please check the appropriate answers below that represents your single status):

Never Married _____

Divorced _____

Widow(er) _____

How long have you been a member of Christ Church?

Under 1 year _____

1-3 years _____

4-10 years _____

Over 10 years _____

Race/Ethnicity: (please check the appropriate answer below that represents your race/ethnicity):

African-American/Black _____

Asian-Pacific Islander _____

Caucasian _____

Hispanic _____

Other (list): _____

Your age: (Please check the appropriate age category)

18-21 _____

22-29 _____

30-39 _____

40-45 _____

Personal Interview Questions:

1. How did you become friends with the following individual?
2. What value do you place on developing friendships in the church, if any?
3. Do you find it easier or harder to develop friendships at this church?
4. What are the main qualities you look for in friendships?
5. How are spiritual friends different from non-spiritual friends?
6. What level of importance do you attach to this friendship based on frequency of social interaction (i.e., dinner engagements, regularity of conversations, etc.)?
7. What friendship stage are you currently: (1) casual acquaintance; (2) close friendship; or (3) very close friendship (i.e., able or have disclosed very private areas of your life).
8. What are two main themes (i.e., religious convictions, dating, goals, fears, fantasies or preferences in clothes, food, and music) that you have disclosed with your friend that you wouldn't have disclosed during the earlier stages of your friendship?

9. What propelled you to self-disclose more to your friend? Or, what characteristics did your friend have that made it easier to self-disclose more?
10. Do you feel compelled to reciprocate self-disclosure once your friend revealed himself to you?
11. What sort of topics would you be willing to disclose to your spiritual friend that you wouldn't disclose to a non-spiritual (church) friend?
12. Are your friendships mutually rewarding? If so, how?
13. What are two changes or ideas that this church can do in order to make friendship development easier and how can the church help support and help you sustain friendships if any?

APPENDIX C: CHRIST CHURCH SINGLE'S MINISTRY SURVEY 2012

Christ Church Single's Ministry Survey 2012

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. Gender:

- ☐ Male
☐ Female

2. Age:

- ☐ 25-29
☐ 30-39
☐ 40-49

***3. Marital Status:**

- ☐ Never Married
☐ Divorced
☐ Married
☐ Widow/Widower
☐ Single Parent

4. How long have you been attending Christ Church?

- ☐ Less than 6 months
☐ Less than 1 year
☐ 1 - 5yrs
☐ 5 + yrs

5. How long have you been a member of Christ Church?

- ☐ Less than 6 months
☐ Less than 1 yr
☐ 1-5 yrs
☐ 5+ yrs

TOPICS OF INTEREST

6. Which of the following topics would you like to see addressed at the Single's Ministry events and small group meetings?

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dating techniques | <input type="checkbox"/> Practicing spiritual disciplines | <input type="checkbox"/> Maintaining abstinence |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Marriage readiness | <input type="checkbox"/> Understanding calling and purpose | <input type="checkbox"/> Freedom from sexual sins |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Couples relationship assessment | <input type="checkbox"/> Reaching other singles | <input type="checkbox"/> Healthy living |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Divorce recovery | <input type="checkbox"/> Living single | <input type="checkbox"/> Dress and grooming |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Developing friendships | <input type="checkbox"/> Mentoring | <input type="checkbox"/> Employment |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Parenting skills | <input type="checkbox"/> Balancing work, home, and ministry | <input type="checkbox"/> Budgeting |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Disciplining your children | <input type="checkbox"/> Job search | <input type="checkbox"/> Principles of Giving |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dating again | <input type="checkbox"/> Changing careers | <input type="checkbox"/> Savings and Retirement |
| <input type="checkbox"/> The blended family | <input type="checkbox"/> Ethics on the Job | <input type="checkbox"/> Business ownership |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Personal holiness | <input type="checkbox"/> Overcoming sexual addictions | |

RETREATS

***7. Would you be interested in attending Single's retreats**

☐ Yes

☐ No

8. If yes, what type of retreat would interest you most?

☐ Teaching type

☐ Spiritual and personal renewal

☐ Adventurous type (camping, fishing, etc.)

☐ Networking with other singles

9. What length of retreat would you prefer?

☐ One night

☐ Two nights

Christ Church Single's Ministry Survey 2012

SMALL GROUPS

***10. Are you currently attending a single's small group?**

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

***11. If no, would you be interested in attending one?**

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

12. Are you interested in being trained as a small group leader?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

13. What would you like to see happen in that group? (select two)

- ☐ Studying the Bible
☐ Talk about relationships and dating
☐ Pray for one another
☐ Discuss how to integrate singleness with your Christian faith

14. How often would you prefer to meet in small groups?

- ☐ Every week for one hour
☐ Once a month for three hours
☐ Every other week for two hours

15. When would you prefer to meet in small groups?

- ☐ Saturday mornings
☐ Friday or Saturday night
☐ Sunday night

***16. Would you be willing to assist on an event/strategy committee?**

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

Christ Church Single's Ministry Survey 2012

17. If yes, what are your areas of potential interest?

- ☐ Publicity, social networking
- ☐ Event coordinator (seminar, outings, etc.)
- ☐ Setup/cleanup
- ☐ Volunteer coordinator
- ☐ Sports coordinator
- ☐ Game night coordinator
- ☐ Marriage readiness instructor

FRIENDSHIP DEVELOPMENT

18. What would you personally like to accomplish through your involvement in the Single's Ministry?

- ☐ A closer walk with God
- ☐ Fellowship with other Christian singles
- ☐ An outlet to vent problems or frustrations
- ☐ More involvement in the church
- ☐ A chance to develop friendships

Other (please specify)

***19. Have you initiated friendships at this church?**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

20. If yes, how many are considered close friends (i.e., able or have disclosed very private areas of your life)?

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5+

21. What level of importance do you place on developing friendships in the church, if any?

- ☐ Low
- ☐ Medium
- ☐ High

***22. Do you find it easy or challenging to develop friendships at this church?**

- ☐ Easy
- ☐ Challenging

***23. If challenging, why?**

--

Christ Church Single's Ministry Survey 2012

CONTACT INFORMATION

24. I would like someone to contact me so that I can become more involved

☐ Yes

☐ No

***25. My contact information is:**

Name:

Email Address (required):

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